MARGARET ARMSTRONG'S CHARITY

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MARGARET ARMSTRONG'S CHARITY

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	A Chance Meeting	1
II	The First Days in Colorado	10
III	The Proposal	22
IV	Tent Life	36
V	Unexpected Guests	54
VI	The Bradford Ancestors	65
VII	The Prospect of Recovery	75
VIII	An Offer for the Mine	84
IX	Riseton Life	94
X	After the Reception	113
XI	The Visit to the Studio	129
XII	A Pleasant Evening at Mrs. Gordon's	137
XIII	Hazen Floyd's Office	149
XIV	A Day at Newport	159
XV	Marriage Certificates	179
XVI	The Partnership	187
XVII	Mrs. Congrene's Family	194
XVIII	The Second Evening	208
XIX	Esther Underwood's Disclosure	214
XX	An Interview with Haze Floyd	223
XXI	Another Glimpse of Riseton	230
XXII	Marion Barton Concludes her Story	239
XXIII	The Sham Marriage Explained	251
XXIV	Margaret's Meeting with Guthrie	260
XXV	Anxiety about Marion	269
XXVI	Uncle Ben Again	279
XXVII	After the Opera	284
XXVIII	The Higher Education	293
XXIX	The Late Confessions	297

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Chapter I

A CHANCE MEETING

It was half an hour after noon on a spring day in 1900. People were hurrying along the streets, drawing wraps and coats closely to shield themselves from the damp and chilly atmosphere usually afforded by Boston in March. But it was nearing the end of the month,—April was only a few days away,—so the discomfort was forgotten in anticipation of warmth that would in its turn wear its welcome out. Even a patch of grimy snow dribbling its substance away in rivulets of water dancing cheerfully along in the sunlight seemed to hold a prophetic air of future joy. At least, that was the language it spoke as it met the eyes of a group of young people just emerging from the art school. They needed no interpreter to translate the signs of spring, as they spoke the same language—Hope and joy. Their hearts beat a response to every suggestion made by this approaching *débutante*.

As they left the shelter of the building, the

wind lashed up its speed, as if to show them that sunshine wasn't the only thing on earth; but they only laughed in its face. The girls turned their backs to the fury and held their hats in place, while the young men rolled up their coat collars, apparently as a matter of form.

They continued their lively chattering until a man walking briskly down the street turned into the art school. They seemingly did not recognize him, for as they dispersed, their glances met in interrogation. He opened the door, and entered the building as one who had been there before yet now felt himself a stranger. Among the students straggling about, who were manifestly acting as critics, he discerned a man ready for departure, going from canvas to canvas.

"How are you, Mr. Hardy?" he asked as he reached him. "I remembered this old habit of yours and hoped I might be fortunate enough to catch you."

"Why Mr. Hayward! I am indeed glad to see you," responded the instructor, in surprised greeting. "You have not favored us with a call for a long time."

"No; art is not my business now."

"Yes; I know. I am sorry it isn't, though. It ought to be your legitimate work."

"I don't know. You see, it has always been

a trick of mine to take the nearest road in life. But I may happen to strike the right track later, so it will amount to the same thing in the end. I am going to have a vacation, and my family thinks a little sight-seeing across the water will help to polish me. I shall allow them the hope of the polish, but I am smuggling my brushes along, and want to ask you about conditions, studios, etc., over there."

"Have you done anything since you left here?"

"Why, yes, I've dabbled some."

"But you are practicing law, are you not?"

"Yes, that is my business, but I have had a side show near my office and pottered in it more or less."

"Good! Many a man has some pet object in life which he would be able to grasp if he only kept it in sight. One can accomplish wonders with the odds and ends of time."

"Perhaps I am taking some valuable scraps of minutes from you, Mr. Hardy," said the young man.

"No, no. Sit down. My wife is in New York this week, so no one expects me at any particular time, and I need to rub thoughts with some one now and then, as I get poverty-stricken in my mind on any affairs excepting art, and one doesn't get much on that subject here—only the

kind fit for infants." His look and smile included the various stragglers about.

"They seem to be taking it rather intensely," said Hayward, motioning toward a little group near them.

"Yes, they are. Whether their serious application is stimulated by bread and butter, I can't say, but I suspect that their future nourishment depends on rather close attention to work, and, as is often the case, they are excelling others who are working from more æsthetic reasons. Isn't that Floyd who used to be here?" Hardy asked as the door opened.

"Yes; this must be a reunion," said Hayward, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone, as he rose from his chair.

Hardy also rose, as though his feast of conversation were ended, and there was not the gleam of welcome in his blue eyes that Hayward had received.

Floyd, tall, dark and handsome, sauntered toward them.

"Why, hello, Wint!" he exclaimed after bowing to Mr. Hardy. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"Ask yourself the same question, and perhaps you will get a better answer than I can give you," Hayward answered, not ungraciously, but carelessly.

"I came for a particular purpose," returned Floyd, a sinister smile playing about his mouth.

"Where are you going to stop over there, Hayward?" Hardy interrupted with pointed disregard of Floyd's presence.

"Paris, I think."

"Going across, Wint?" Floyd inquired.

"I'm thinking of it."

Floyd, although not sensitive, felt a change in the atmosphere after his entrance.

"What were you talking about that seemed so interesting when I came in?"

"We were speaking of ardent and hungry grinds in general, and that bunch over there in particular," Hayward answered.

"Got a lot of them here this year, Mr. Hardy?" Floyd asked with something more than passing interest.

"As usual, too many," Mr. Hardy answered briefly.

"Are those three grinds of the hungry kind?" Floyd asked, indicating the group already referred to.

"Yes, the most talented ones."

"What is the boy doing here in the life class?"

"He is here, so he must be allowed," Mr. Hardy said smiling, "but the young women are both on a firm footing. The dark one has talent and regard enough for details to make her mark in the world. The other one"—

"The study in skin and bones, with a red halo?" interrupted Floyd.

"Why, that girl has the making of a raving beauty!" said Hayward.

"She isn't my style," persisted Floyd, "although she does have quite a high-frequency illumination in her face when she speaks. Listen," he said, raising a finger with the calm self-assurance one often sees in a conceited, domineering person.

While they stood silent one could have easily read some of the leading characteristics in each. Mr. Hardy, with his refined gravity and grayness, appeared a man whose only enjoyable browsing-ground would be in mental and intellectual fields; while Floyd's face hinted of the other extreme. It might seem that in the evolution of the spirit there had been some break in the regular course of things, to thus lodge this soul in human form, and the physical had responded by certain indefinable suggestions.

Hayward's fine frank face was one to satisfy the eye of the most exacting. His humorous smile showed how he tolerated Floyd's imperative gesture for silence.

"Why, Dick!" came the clear young voice of the girl Floyd had called "skin and bones." "You would do great work on anti-fat ads. He is perfectly enormous."

The various canvases about showed the figure of a man draped in a long cape. The cape did not disguise the thinness of the model, but, on the other hand, had accented it to almost emaciation. On Dick's canvas, however, the limit of the cape was disclosed by the broad shoulders of the figure in it.

"Why, he is positively huge!" continued the girl.

"I don't care," Dick replied. "I am only after lines and poise, and they are all right."

"The poise is all right, Dick," the girl laughed, "only it is avoirdupois."

"Say, Barty, you are too hard on Dick," commented the dark girl.

"No, I am not a bit. He called my composition on children last week 'Mellin's Food Babies.' Now I am paying him back."

Dick grinned. "They were, Miss Raynor. You never saw anything so fat."

"Plumpness is rather more artistic at four than forty," retorted the girl called Barty.

"Well," said Dick, slowly and seriously, "if a chap has been hungry for six weeks, he likes to see everything and everybody look as though they had enough to eat."

"That is true," agreed Barty, a glance of sympathy and understanding coming into her brown eyes. "And he does look so comfortable,

Dick, as though he had a wallet in some inside pocket of that cape with bank-bills enough in it to keep him happy for months."

"You wait, Barty," said Dick, as free with his sympathy as the girl had been with hers. "Everybody has an inning sometime. When ours comes, we will be ready to get a grip on life."

"My grip on life is all right," she answered lightly. "You had better trot along, Dicky, to your four-course dinner to strengthen yours, and Raynie and I must sprint on to our hotel."

The three moved to the door, regarded by the men as a hopeful, happy and hungry trio.

"I am off, too," said Floyd, the moment the door had closed behind the others, and he left Hardy and Hayward with scant courtesy.

"Do you suppose Floyd is on a mission of charity?" asked Hayward, looking after his retreating figure.

"I am inclined to pity the charitable object less than the object of his charity," Hardy replied. "I have always been keenly aware of the depravity of human nature when that man is about."

"You were going to say something about that other girl, when Floyd interrupted you," said Hayward, his mind reverting for some reason to her rather unusual personality.

"Oh, yes; there was nothing especial to say, only that she has great originality. It is her strong point, and it is, in a way, in harmony with a vivacity she possesses. You cannot seem to gauge her limit because she is always rising to the unexpected."

Chapter II

THE FIRST DAYS IN COLORADO

Margaret Armstrong was not quite used to such a free and informal approach from strangers, but there was something so genuinely honest and frank in his face and manner, and she had heard so much of Western cordiality, that she was disarmed of her reserve and answered his question at least politely.

"No, I have never been in Colorado before."

"Great country," he remarked, drawing a chair forward and motioning Margaret to be seated. The act was so courteous that it was awkward to decline, so she sat down, holding herself in tense alertness, waiting for an opportunity to slip away without seeming rude. But after a few moments she relaxed and listened with interest to what he was saying.

"I often tell my wife," he continued, as he brought his own chair to within hearing range, "that it would have been a pity to have missed this part of the world from our lives, although when we came here we thought the cause that brought us the greatest trial we had ever had. We came—as the multitude comes. My wife could not have stood another winter in the

East, but she gained from the moment we reached here. However, all are not so fortunate. The misery and disappointment I have seen in the past ten years would wring the hardest heart. It is sometimes tragic when you see some poor creature begin to lose hope. Yet on the whole I have enjoyed my practice here."

"You are a physician?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, yes. I am afraid I haven't introduced myself quite properly, and I have no doubt you are rather shocked at my presumption, but this is the way it is: I stand a self-appointed host here. I came to this place with my wife ten years ago. She recovered entirely, but I rather feared the result of a return to the East, so we have always stayed in, or close to, this little hotel, and we have both formed the habit of extending a hand of welcome to everyone who enters here a stranger. I hope you will not think," he added with a smile, "that I was drumming up trade."

"Oh, no," returned Margaret, laughing. "I trust I do not present the appearance of a prospective patient."

"We have been quite impartial in our attentions to the ill and the well. We recalled our own loneliness, and resolved to lessen, if possible, some of the dubiousness for others; but I presume —in fact, I am sure—we have often offended

some of our reserved friends from the East; but, on the other hand, I think we may have balanced that, by making others feel a little less lonely."

"I am sure you have," responded Margaret warmly. "I have lived my life in New England, and I think as a rule people feel kindly toward each other, but unfortunately they are careless about demonstrating their feelings."

"You are from Boston, are you not? I looked at the register while you were at supper, so I know you are Miss Armstrong. I am Dr. Pallam, formerly of the same town. It is a fine old town, isn't it? I always look up people's names and, as they used to say on the Maine coast, where they hail from, before I venture to speak, and I try to avoid a formal introduction, as it so often freezes any cordiality on either side. The people east of Chicago lose much by not cultivating the amenities of life more. My wife used to say she hoped this reserved, self-contained ailment was not contagious, as she sometimes felt, when some of the people to whom she had tried to show a little kindness repulsed her, that she must snub some one else in retaliation. But I fancy we are both immune from the disease by this time,—at least I hope so."

"Is your wife here at present?" Margaret asked.

"My wife went to Italy last autumn with friends. I am to sail from New York in two weeks to meet her, and we shall come directly here on our return. Are you to remain long?"

"I hardly know," replied Margaret. "Please do not set that down as New England reserve, for it isn't. You see, I have no plans. I got restless in Boston and started to go somewhere and just happened to come here."

"You are a most encouraging subject, Miss Armstrong. Your inclinations are native to the Western air, so to speak. Had you been a real Bostonian, your plans would all have been cut and dried before you started."

"I am afraid the cut-and-dried plan is better."

"Well, perhaps so, but it is the adventuresome person who enjoys things with the greatest zest. On the other hand, they suffer from their lack of forethought. I am very much interested in a man who is stopping a mile up from here. He is suffering the torture of tortures in his mind, yet I imagine he has been a man who previously calculated every step. At present, he is regretting things with a misery that a careless person could not feel."

"Is he ill?" asked Margaret.

"He cannot live three months."

"Is he unhappy because he is not reconciled to dying?"

"Not quite that. I will tell you as nearly as I can what I have been able to get out of him. He is one of those self-contained men who has never cried baby, and it is mighty hard for him to wail now. But he can't quite conceal his misery from me. I have probed hard and learned this much: His home was in a small New Hampshire town. He was a little chap when his father died, so very early took a man's care on his shoulders, and, being an only child, his mother became the sole object for the kind of a devoted adoration that such a chivalrous nature would have. I don't know just how it all came about, for, mind you, this has been extracted by piecemeal and I have guessed at half of it. He worked in a factory in his first youth, later worked in same factory and studied law. After he left Boston University, where he finished his law studies, he went back to the factory to save enough money to warrant the opening of a law office, and lastly he got possession of some mining property out here and came out last fall to try to sell it. He had spent all or nearly all of the money he had brought with him, with no prospect of selling the mine, when he took a severe cold. He realizes now that his days are numbered."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Margaret. "What is his great anxiety? Is it his mother?"

"You have said it. You see, he left her with a small amount of money—two hundred dollars or so. He owns the little house she lives in, but she is not young—her health very delicate—and he has always shielded her, I think, as if she were a child. Of course he does not say this, but I gather it from things he has said. He writes her often—it is his one extravagance—and writes cheerfully. He has not suggested that he isn't well, as he cannot bear to inflict the consequent suffering, yet he knows the time is coming when she must bear it. You see, he hasn't the means to get home, and cannot ask her to send any part of the small amount she may have left, as they would be penniless if she did that. Isn't it a tragedy?"

"Why, it is awful! And I suppose his body cannot even be sent home."

"No; but I don't know as that would be a great comfort. His mind is constantly working to devise ways of getting money to send to his mother, and of course to pay for the trifle he needs here, for he is honest to excess. He boarded for a short time, but as soon as he found there was any danger he would not be able to pay his bills, he moved into a little shanty and lives on next to nothing—crackers mostly, I think."

"I should like to see him," said Margaret.

"I wish you would. Do you know it has troubled me to think of leaving him alone so soon. I wish you could go up to-morrow. Let me see—how can it be arranged? You can have the hotel carriage take you up that way for a ride. I will go ahead and be there when you pass. I shall be very glad for you to see him, for to me he seems one of the finest characters I have ever known."

"Is he young?"

"I think he told me he is thirty-four, but that seems rather young to an old fellow of sixty-five."

The next morning Dr. Pallam managed it as he had suggested. He walked up early and was sitting on a rude seat near the road, beside the patient, when Margaret passed. They exchanged civilities; the carriage stopped, so Margaret was introduced to the stranger. He was tall and thin. His face, she thought, was fine without being handsome.

"Miss Armstrong has come to be a neighbor of yours, Mr. Guthrie," remarked Dr. Pallam, genially.

Mr. Guthrie bowed. Most men could easily have said something of a complimentary nature, but he did not. He simply remarked:

"It is a beautiful climate here. I hope Miss Armstrong will enjoy it."

"You should have some interests in common," ventured Dr. Pallam. "You are both from the East."

"Indeed!" returned Mr. Guthrie, in an absent-minded, far-away manner, as though the reference to the East had awakened painful thoughts.

Margaret's sensitive nature felt a pang of pity.

"I may be going East later," she said. "Are there any messages I can take for you?"

Guthrie glanced up quickly; he really saw her then. His face lighted, and something like a smile made him a handsome man for a moment. He saw the beautiful gray eyes, the dark wavy hair brushed back from the forehead, the sweet firm lips, and the tender pity in her face glowing over all. Guthrie was seeing with his mother's eyes. It seemed something tangible that he could send her, a message by such a medium—it was surely something!

"Why, yes," he faltered, "I should like very much to send a message, but I haven't"—

"It isn't composed, is it?" inquired Dr. Pallam, smiling.

"No," replied Guthrie, briefly.

"Oh, that is all right, Mr. Guthrie. I am not going for quite a little time yet. Perhaps you will let me come up and call sometime, and I will try to remember all the messages you may wish to send."

"I shall be very glad to have you come." He spoke earnestly, intensely. He was still thinking of his mother.

The latter part of the afternoon, when Dr. Pallam met Margaret on the piazza, he said:

"Well, were you as impressed by the strength of Guthrie as I have been?"

"Why, I saw him for only a few moments, but he has a fine face."

"Yes, of course you could not judge so quickly. But did you notice how immaculate he looked? Why, one would suppose that he had a barber, tailor and laundress at his beck and call, whereas he has nothing. He works in his laundry nearly every day. It consists of soap, water and a bucket, but you see the result is good. The wonderful thing about it is that the man is, must be, very weak, and it is entirely contrary to the disease for him to continue these tests to his strength. Most tubercular cases, although *hope* may last to the end, grow careless and neglectful of themselves; but his strength of will prods him up to the mark."

"Have you told him he cannot live?"

"Yes, I have been perfectly frank with him. I told him a week or two ago that he could not be alive in four months at the latest, and probably not three. One lung is in bad shape, and what is most against him, he is wasted to a skeleton."

"I suppose," began Margaret, slowly, "if he could be assured that someone would care for his mother, or comfort and care for her, it would lessen this harrowing anxiety."

"To be sure; but that seems impossible. They have no relatives whatever. I presume, however, living in a small village, she will not be allowed to suffer, that her neighbors will look after her; but this idea seems gall and wormwood to him."

"Then you think if he should know she would be cared for, that is, never come to want, but if such care were to come from a stranger, it would not make things much easier for him?"

"Oh, I will not say that,—he is too fine not to take comfort from such knowledge; but you see, he is so devoted to his mother, that to die and leave her is misery enough, but if he could leave something for her care himself—coming from him, you know—I think it would give him the feeling that he had left an arm about her."

"Yes, I see. Is there no chance that his mine will be sold soon?"

"No, I think not. There are a great many claims of this kind, and the strikes out here have been an injury to mining property. It has seemed rather strange to me that so conservative a man should have put the amount he did into this mine; but a month ago I was

called over to a small camp ten miles from here to set a bone for one of the miners, and discovered that he used to live in the big mining district, so knew the man well who owned the claim Guthrie bought.

"He told me the man was a native of Guthrie's village, but had a wife and children in Illinois. His wife became very ill, and they sent for him, but he could not raise the money to go, as he had put every penny into the mine. He telegraphed Guthrie for some, and got it. Later he wrote this man that he had proposed to Guthrie to take the thing off his hands, as he could not leave Illinois and was in great need of money. So I suppose Guthrie bought it then. The man was honest, no doubt, and thought his friend would get out of it all right, but that was two or three years ago, and since then, as I said, the strikes have demolished the business prospects about here."

"You say he can't sell it now, but do you think the mine worthless?"

"No; if Guthrie were to live and look after it, he might get out of it whole. These things go by fits and starts; all development has stopped, but the land is in a section that is supposed to be valuable. No one can tell until he goes ahead and develops it. His mother will get little or nothing out of it after he is gone, and he realizes that fully."

"What is the value of the claim?"

"I think he paid twenty-five hundred for it, but my dear Miss Armstrong, Guthrie will never allow you to buy it; it would savor too much of charity."

"I do not propose to. In fact I can't at present."

Chapter III

THE PROPOSAL

Guthrie and Margaret had met nearly every day for two weeks, but no allusion had been made to Margaret's return to Boston. The morning after Dr. Pallam left for New York she started for Guthrie's wayside inn as usual, but had walked only a short distance when she saw him coming toward the hotel.

"Why, Mr. Guthrie!" she exclaimed. "Aren't you walking a longer distance than Dr. Pallam advised?"

Guthrie had an attack of coughing, but as soon as he could speak said: "Dr. Pallam is of the past. He has not advised me this morning. I was anxious to see you. I have been ashamed that you have been allowed to do all of the walking before to-day."

"But I am a good walker, and I enjoy it."

"Well, I am here," he said dryly. "Can we find a place to sit? I want to talk to you."

After they were seated Guthrie began. "Has Dr. Pallam ever told you anything about my affairs?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, I don't seem to know how he learned

so much. I must have been very garrulous, for he seems to know almost more about me than I know about myself."

"Perhaps he knows more than there is to know."

"Oh, no," quickly rejoined Guthrie; "he has been very kind to me and I am sure understands my situation perfectly. Miss Armstrong, are you willing that I should ask a great favor of you? If you cannot grant it, you can tell me so frankly, but if you feel you can, it will be a great kindness."

"I am almost sure I shall be very glad to do anything you may ask, but if there should be a reason why I cannot, I will surely tell you."

"Thank you. I hardly know how to begin. Has Dr. Pallam told you that I shall not be alive in four months?"

"Yes, he told me."

"And did he tell you that my life has been a failure?"

"No, he did not mention that."

"Well, it has. I don't know why I can talk to you, as usually I cannot talk easily of myself. I have the best mother God ever gave to a man, and I have failed utterly in my care of her."

"But it is not your fault."

"Yes it is. I am a man, and I should have had some foresight, some care for the future;

but I have always been so strong it never occurred to me there was any chance I should not be able to stand by my mother every moment of her life." There was a break in his voice followed by a fit of coughing.

"Well, it is this: I want to ask you," he continued, as if trying to stick to facts, "when you return to the East, do you go to Boston?"

"Yes, I—I think I may."

"Do you know where Wyndal, New Hampshire, is?"

"Yes, I know very well. It is about ninety miles from Boston, isn't it?"

"Yes, just about. If you are in Boston in four months or less, will it be possible for you to go to Wyndal?"

"Yes, I can go very easily and shall be very glad to do so."

"If you leave here before that time, can you keep me informed of your address?"

"Certainly."

"Then, if I may, I will give you some letters and papers to take to my mother, and will you tell her, please, that I was well cared for by friends, and I did not write of my illness because I could not? And tell her—tell her, if you will, that my only suffering was in the thought of leaving her. I am writing some advice, but perhaps if you can second it, or impress it on

her, it will be of more use. I have asked her, in one of the letters you will take, to try to get the address of George Hanscomb, as he has left Illinois and I have not been able to reach him. He is the man from whom I bought a claim. If she gets his address, tell her to write him the circumstances. I think if he can he will help to dispose of the mine. And Miss Armstrong, I do not ask this, but I wish it might be possible for you to stay with my mother for a little while. She will be very much broken. If you could talk to her of me, I think it would be a great comfort. This must all seem very queer to you—for a perfect stranger to ask such favors, but a drowning man grasps at a straw."

"No, it does not seem strange—it seems fine for you to think of your mother as you do, and natural that you should take any chance to lessen her suffering. My mother left me four years ago, and it seemed as though the whole world had gone. I shall be only too glad to go to your mother and stay as long as I may be acceptable. I am entirely alone in the world, so there will be no reason why I cannot if I choose, and I shall choose."

"Do you mean it? I cannot tell you how much I thank you!"

"But Mr. Guthrie, if you could sell your claim, would it not make your mother happier for you to go to her?"

A spasm of pain crossed his face. "It is what I would like to do more than anything, but I can't sell, and perhaps it will be better for mother if I do not go. It would be hard for her to see me—dying, but sometimes it seems as though I could not go without seeing her again."

"Wouldn't Dr. Pallam have bought the mine?"

"Yes, I think he would have if he could. Dr. Pallam's father left him an annuity which I think keeps them comfortable, but I also think there is not much left at the end of the year. The doctor has a large practice, but it is mostly charitable, for there are a great many poor natives here, or about here."

They sat in silence for some time. Margaret seemed to be thinking deeply. Suddenly she looked up and said, "Mr. Guthrie, you are very tired to-day, but sometime, not this morning, I am going to say something that will shock you horribly."

As the days went on, Margaret seemed to have forgotten what she had had in her mind to say to Guthrie. When they met, which was almost daily, they talked on impersonal subjects, usually existence, religion or the future. Guthrie occasionally referred to what she had suggested saying, with a hope that it related to his mother, but as Margaret seemed to evade

any explanation, he avoided after a time any allusion to it, and grew anxious and depressed.

One morning, two or three weeks after Dr. Pallam's departure, Margaret started up the road toward Guthrie's abode. She found him in a rude hammock improvised by the doctor. He arose when he saw her.

"I am very glad you have come," he said gravely. "I should have called on you this morning if I had felt I had sufficient strength for it. I want to talk with you. For some reason, Miss Armstrong, I have felt that you are regretting what you promised me on impulse or in pity some time ago. Am I right?"

"No, not quite."

"But I am partly?" The keen disappointment showed in his voice. "Of course I cannot allow you to do anything that is going to be a burden to you. I ought not to have thought it possible. Be truthful with me, will you, and if there are reasons why you cannot carry out the plan we talked of, tell me so as frankly as you promised."

"Mr. Guthrie, you misunderstand me, or at least you do not read my mind correctly. I am just as glad and anxious to go to your mother as when we first talked of it, but I want to go in the best way for her and for me. I am afraid you will not be able to see what came into my mind that day when we had been

talking. I told you I would go to your mother and stay as long as it seemed a comfort to her. What occurred to me was this: I am afraid in a small town it will be misunderstood and perhaps be unpleasant for both her and me."

"What will be misunderstood?" asked Guthrie.

"I told you that you would not understand," replied Margaret, flushing, "but I will try to explain. I go to your mother,—I, a young woman, at least a woman of thirty. I knew you; I was friendly to the extent of visiting and staying with your mother. It would be hard for her to hear comments made, even if I did not mind."

"Yes, I see," he said gloomily.

"I told you the other day that I was going to say something to shock you and I am going to say it now. When the thought came to me that the plan we had talked of did not seem the best, a remedy came to my mind which will be of great value to me, and, I think, a more comforting arrangement for your mother."

"What is it?"

"I don't know how I am going to tell you what I want to say—and what I shall say"—Margaret hesitated and stopped.

"Well, what is it," Guthrie asked gently.

Margaret did not answer for a few moments. "I want to tell you first that the proposition I

am going to make does not come from sympathy, pity or anything of that kind. It is purely selfish."

"Tell me, and let me be the judge."

"It is this," Margaret replied very slowly. "You will—you will have no use for your name very long. Will you give it to me?" Her face was deadly pale when she had finished.

"I don't quite understand"— he began in a dazed manner; then as the import of her words came to him, he said: "Don't, Miss Armstrong, don't pity me so much. I cannot bear it."

"But I told you it was not pity," she replied calmly, her self-poise returning as the need of it came. "Let me explain what I mean. I am a woman thirty years old; I know no man whom I would marry and live the remainder of my life with, but perhaps I do not wish to go through life as a woman who has been slighted and left."

"Left!" exclaimed Guthrie. "*You* left! No one could *ever* think that!"

"Why, it is thought of every unmarried woman in the world. The gentle sarcasm on her old-maidish ways, the pitying glances, the smile if she speaks to a man—as if she, like Diogenes, were always looking for one, honest or otherwise."

"Miss Armstrong, all of your arguments cannot deceive me. You have proposed this simply out of pity."

"Don't you think it possible for me to speak the truth, Mr. Guthrie?"

"Why, of course, when your mind is not warped by pity."

"I was speaking the sincere truth," said Margaret; "but if you choose to repulse me, I can say no more," and she rose.

"Don't for God's sake misunderstand me," cried Guthrie, hoarsely, between spasms of coughing. "I only"—

"I am so sorry if I have troubled you," interrupted Margaret. She was agitated by a thought. "Perhaps my suggestion was an insult to some other woman."

Guthrie turned abruptly. "No, you have not hurt me there. I have never cared for a woman in my life, except my mother, but it seems such a sacrifice, like an offering of your life. It is splendid of you, but I should feel like a scoundrel to allow it."

Margaret remained silent for some moments, then said: "I think you are magnifying the offense. I only asked your name, but that would allow me to go to your mother a daughter."

"Yes, it is the one thing on earth I could wish; but I do not like to feel that during my last days

here I took advantage of such generosity. I understand you only ask my name, but it is the name of a man who has made life a failure."

"You say that because you think you have failed to care for your mother, but you have cared for her in the past, and you may know, if you like, that she will be cared for in the future."

"Let me think." He leaned his head in his hands. After a few moments he raised it. "It is this way, Miss Armstrong: I have made stupid mistakes in my life, but I have always tried to be true to myself, so that I could look myself in the face, so to speak. I think you cannot understand fully why this would seem to me the act of a miserable degenerate, a tramp."

"You are not complimentary to me. I made the suggestion."

Guthrie colored. "I will make a confession to you. I cannot bear to forfeit your respect, and I do not see how I can keep it if I allow you to indulge in this great generosity."

"Trust me to keep my respect for you," said Margaret, smiling. "If you talk of that much more, I shall die of mortification. I have seemed to throw my respect for myself, yours for me, to the winds, and do not regret it in the least. I shall always think of you as one of the most devoted sons I have ever met, whatever you

decide to do in this matter. Even if I know you are harboring a horrible disgust for me, I cannot forget that."

"Please don't say those things," pleaded Guthrie, "because I cannot bear to have you think there is anything but respect, admiration and—and—everything in my thoughts of you. And I am going to say I hope you will never regret your kindness to me, it will give me such peace. It will be selfish, but I am too weak to refuse it."

"I hope there will be no reason for *you* to regret—you will be sending a stranger to your mother."

"I have no fears on that score, and please do not think my hesitation was due to any doubt of you. I have never been an object of pity, and it seemed almost more than I could bear, to accept alms from a woman I—I—respect, and one who is in no way responsible for my misfortune."

"I think *I* am the object of charity. I begged your name, and I should be the only one to suffer for what the world would call a most indelicate attitude for any woman. If the arrangement brings you peace, it will bring me pride in the possession of my title."

"I do not understand that idea; it seems very ridiculous to me."

"Because you are a man. But nearly every woman in the world would understand."

"I should have thought you would not have cared for anything of that kind."

Margaret winced. "I ought to be above such narrowness, but the world sets the pace by which we live, and women are narrow at best, I fancy," she replied a little miserably.

"I will accept all of your pretenses as sterling. You have raised my estimate of a good woman higher, if possible, than it was before. Now what are to be the details of the crime?" he asked whimsically, the smile flitting over his face, that transformed it.

"It does seem rather like that, doesn't it," said Margaret, a trifle anxiously. "You see, I have been so busy getting my arguments into shape, I haven't had time, and I think I haven't had faith enough, to anticipate the possibility of it."

"I presume you did me the honor to think me above yielding."

"Yes, perhaps so; but I did take time to think of your mother. Don't you think you should write her to-day?"

"I have written once, but I will write again."

"Wouldn't it be better to tell her that you are not very well?"

"I can't, but I will write about the other, and

perhaps you will send her a letter, and you can mention something about my condition. We shall not write anything, shall we, for mother to know how this came about."

"Oh, not for worlds, because—because she will be happier to think you are happy."

"I am."

"You mean that you are less unhappy about your mother," corrected Margaret. "About the other plans," she continued, "don't you think a tent life would be comfortable for the summer?"

"Yes, the best of anything."

"When I stopped at Denver, just before I came here, I met some people at the hotel who had come from B—; they had been there four years for Mr. Chafney's health. They are people of wealth, I fancy, and had set up a home of tents which they were anxious to sell just as they stand, entirely furnished for housekeeping. They seemed to be willing to sell for a song, as there is not much demand for such establishments at this season of the year. They thought then of starting for New York the 8th of May, that will be next Saturday. They are going abroad, and their steamer sails on the following Saturday."

"Did you think you might be able to get the outfit?" asked Guthrie, with interest.

"Yes, I thought perhaps we could."

"It would certainly be much easier for you than to start at the beginning."

"And quicker," added Margaret. "If I go down and find it is all right, I can telegraph you and we can meet at Roden, then go back together."

"And shall I pass the name of Guthrie on to you at Roden?"

Margaret colored, but answered quietly, "Yes, I think that will be the better way, won't it?"

"Perhaps. Is there a man of the cloth there?"

"There is a church-spire, so I presume there is."

"When shall we make the start?" asked Guthrie.

"I don't know. Why can't I telephone to the Chafneys this afternoon,—they are still in Denver,—and ask them if their home is sold, and find out the terms? I may not be able to get them, but I can try. To-day is Thursday; if we get the place, I can go down to-morrow,—if the Chafneys can go,—then meet you at Roden Saturday morning and go back in the afternoon."

Chapter IV

TENT LIFE

There was a satisfactory answer to the telephone, and Margaret went up early the next morning to tell Guthrie of their good fortune in securing the place at a very low figure.

"You see, I am packing," said Guthrie, in a slightly embarrassed manner.

"It is good to get it done before to-morrow; the journey will be hard enough. You will get some one to take you to the station, won't you? That reminds me: I want to ask you a question, but I want you to promise not to be offended."

"I will promise."

"May I make you a little present?" She broke into a nervous laugh quite unlike herself.

Guthrie smiled. "That depends," he said. "If it is a diamond ring I shall refuse it, but if it is a needle and thread I shall accept, for I have lost mine."

Margaret slipped a crumpled piece of green paper on the table.

"No, no, it isn't necessary," he said, pushing it back. "I am still a capitalist. I have exactly five dollars and eighty-four cents. It seems

proper for me to name my assets to you. I have no liabilities. Remember you haven't the goods yet. Don't pay until the name is delivered."

"You will excuse me, won't you?" Margaret asked humbly.

"I don't need to excuse you. I thank you more than I can tell you. How should you know that I am a man of wealth?"

There was an air of cheerfulness about him that Margaret had never seen before. She attributed it to his lessened anxiety in regard to his mother.

On her way to B— she could not make it like the funeral she had thought it would seem.

Guthrie, on his part, was planning to gain strength to get to B— the next day without falling by the wayside. He called to a small boy who was passing, gave him some money, telling him to ask his mother to send him a good dinner. It was a good dinner, and the first real meal Guthrie had eaten for a long time, and he ate with a keen relish. The next morning he ordered breakfast, with a strong cup of coffee. When the same boy brought the team to take him to the station, he got into the carriage with more strength than he had felt for weeks. If Pallam had not pronounced my doom, he thought, I should feel like an impostor. But

when four o'clock came and he had had the long ride from Roden he was quite ready to agree with Dr. Pallam's diagnosis.

The moment they reached the tents he felt that the hardships of life were over for him. Four tents on line facing the southwest, a piazza or platform twelve or fifteen feet wide extending the length of the entire row. On this were chairs, a couch, a tea-table, etc. Margaret thoughtfully pushed an easy-chair toward him, into which he sank. In less than ten minutes she had brought a steaming bowl of beef tea.

"Why, where did this come from," he asked. "Is this one of those fairy places where 'Presto Change' and you immediately get what you want?"

Margaret laughed. "I am not going to talk with you until you are rested, then I will do all of the talking, as I have so much to tell I can hardly wait."

She went into one of the tents, laid aside her hat and wrap, leaving her in the simple white dress in which she had been made Mrs. Guthrie. A few moments later as she was entering another tent Guthrie called, "I am rested now."

She sat down beside him. "I am very anxious to talk, so will pretend to believe you. Do you know everything is extremely nice here,—an open grate in the living-room, a regular stove in

the kitchen and all that wood piled up out there to burn?"

"What is what?" asked Guthrie, waving his hand toward the row of tents.

"That is your room on the right, next to that is the living-room, next to that the kitchen and the last one is mine."

"That is good," remarked Guthrie. "I sometimes cough in the night and it will not disturb you as much at that distance."

"It was arranged in that way because Mr. Chafney coughed badly the first year they were here."

"You did not stay here alone last night, did you?"

"No, I stayed at the hotel, but I did not register."

"Why not," asked Guthrie. "What excuse did you offer?"

"I just said that I would rather not, and they did not seem to mind. Perhaps they think I am a little queer in my head."

"Your head is as clear as sunshine. I did not get it through *mine* why the minister at Roden was to keep our affair perfectly quiet, until we were jogging over the ruts down here this afternoon. Some little jolt must have produced an illumination on my mind for a moment, and I saw it."

"Isn't it better?" asked Margaret, quietly.

"Of course; but you see, my clumsy brain would not have had the agility to have worked in time; but it is certainly best for us to be regarded as a matter-of-fact old couple."

"Isn't this beautiful!" he said, turning his chair from the view of the tents toward the southwest. He knew that Margaret must be aware of his appreciation of everything, but he wanted her to know a little how deeply he felt.

"Yes, I think it is grand," answered Margaret, simply, as though she were in no way connected with the place they were in. "Oh, I forgot to tell you the very best thing: the water is simply delicious and is piped to the kitchen! Don't you think we are very fortunate, Mr. Guthrie?"

"Yes, Mrs. Guthrie," he answered, smiling.

Margaret colored.

"I have been wanting to talk with you about names," he said. "Don't you think it is better to begin calling each other by our first ones? Are you willing to try it?"

"If it seems best," replied Margaret, slowly. "But do you think it is necessary? I do not believe it will be noticed by any one we shall meet here."

"But have you thought of mother? Knowing me, she could never understand, and if you do

not practice, you will surely be calling me by the name you have used here, and it will be difficult for you to talk freely with her."

"Yes, I see. I am perfectly willing."

"Mother has always called me Mac, but if you prefer Malcolm, that will be all right."

"Oh, no; if I change, I will call you by the name your mother uses. Isn't that all right, Mac?"

She spoke the name a little hurriedly, but heroically.

"Thank you, Margaret." The color rose from his pallid cheek to his brown hair. "If we practice a bit, we shall soon forget what names we do use," he said.

In the days that followed, Margaret tried to subdue her rising spirits. She knew it would seem unbecoming in her to appear to be gay, with one of her family on probation for eternity; but ministering to some one, being useful, gave her a happiness she had not known since her mother's death. Bits of song burst from her lips, to be silenced the moment she realized it.

Guthrie continued cheerful. "Do you know," he said to her one day, "I wish you would sing five minutes at a time. I am very fond of music, but these one-minute performances are somewhat trying; still, you don't know how much I enjoy even those."

"Why, I make myself stop," said Margaret, "because it seems strange in me to do it."

"Well, don't make yourself stop any more. I enjoy it very much. It almost seems at times as if you are happy."

"I am," confessed Margaret. "I cannot explain it, except that I think any one is happier not to be living entirely for his own pleasure, —that is, to be doing some trifle for some one else."

"Yes, I agree with you, but all signs fail sometimes. I am contributing to the comfort of no one, yet there is a quality of happiness with which I am not intimately acquainted, that seems to stay with me. I am enjoying the prospect of a letter from mother just now. Isn't it about time we heard from her?"

"To-day is the first day we could hear, and the man promised to drive around this way from Roden, you know, so we shall not lose a moment when it does come."

"Isn't that he now?" asked Guthrie, as a cart appeared around the bend of road. He arose and they went together to the wagon.

"It is addressed to both of us," he said, taking the letter from the man.

"You may read it first," decided Margaret. "I want to speak to Mr. Johnson a moment."

When Margaret went back to the piazza,

Guthrie was deep in the letter, his face was flushed, and the old pained expression there. When he had finished it he brought it to her.

"I am going out to sit in the sun a little while," he said, still holding the letter in his hand. "I want you to understand," he began, "that mother feels very strongly about some things, and she evidently thinks our silence on these matters was on the 'too deep for utterance' plan. Mother is never sentimental, you know, but always fine."

Margaret took the letter, and Guthrie walked away.

It began:

"My dear Children, Mac and Margaret,—I know you will be glad to get a line from mother, even though your love for each other must almost seem all that you need in the world. I am so happy for you and trust you will love and cherish each other as long as you live. Margaret speaks of Mac as not well. Don't be too anxious, my dear daughter, but I know, loving him as you must, you will naturally feel anxious for his welfare"—

The letter went on in a dear mother's own way. Margaret felt a sense of guilt and almost wanted to run away when she realized what constraint might be placed between her and

Guthrie. She felt a great relief when she saw him approaching the tents with a stranger. He introduced the gentleman as Mr. Fairchild. His face, like Guthrie's, was wan and pallid, but there seemed a perpetual smile hovering over it.

"I hope you will pardon me for this early call, Mrs. Guthrie, but Guthrie, whom I met out here, mentioned a comfortable chair, so I followed."

"I am very glad to see you; we shall take no exception to the earliness, I assure you," said Margaret, with a smile.

"No; my wife and I do not split hairs over conventionalities," put in Guthrie.

"Very fortunate to possess such ideas; and do you know how fortunate you are to have your wife with you?"

"Yes, I think so. Isn't your wife with you?"

"No, she is in Boston where it is unfashionable to be ill."

"Is she a Christian Scientist?" asked Guthrie, with his unhappy directness.

Fairchild closed his eyes for one half-moment, as though the direct allusion to his wife was hardly palatable.

"Not all of it yet, I think, but enough to make her believe that suffering is a delusion of weak minds."

"Strange what a spell that woman Eddy has cast on people, isn't it," asked Guthrie.

"No, not strange; people enjoy being mystified. There is a lady at the hotel who believes she reads people's minds like an open book, and you would be surprised to see how some of the people like to be read. If she tells them they have wonderful things on their minds, they are as pleased as a baby with a rattle. But there are all kinds of us up there," he sighed. "One of us is a young girl whose mother sent her out here for some supposed lung trouble. She had her mind read the other day, and was in ecstasy over the delightful things the woman found there. She has a nurse with her who is rather an inflexible kind of a person, and I have no doubt would have defined the mental ins and outs of her young charge very differently."

"I suppose the nurse would see one side of her, and the mind-reader the other," said Margaret.

"No, I think we read other people through our own minds, or the general attitude of our minds. The nurse, poor woman, is having a hard time. She feels that she is rather ignored, and I think that she is, but the more indifferent people are to her, the more independent and unyielding she gets, so that one could easily imagine her a member of the royal family, and she naturally regards everyone as arrogant."

"Blue glasses," suggested Guthrie.

"Exactly. Yet there is a tinge of real color to her ideas. The child got so uppish with her she felt obliged to send East for an old-maid aunt or cousin to stand at the helm. Now it is vastly amusing to see the play go on. That reminds me," he added, looking at his watch, "I shall lose the next performance if I don't move, and I am sure I have been taxing your patience with my yarns."

"We shall regard you as a godsend, if you will only promise to come again," Guthrie hastened to say cordially.

"Yes," supplemented Margaret, "we shall be delighted to be taxed by such entertainment very often."

"I am tremendously grateful, and I promise that you shall see me often enough. I understand that Guthrie and I are in the same class, or, that is, making for the same goal."

This allusion to his health was made cheerfully, and no one remarked on it.

The morning after the letter had come from Guthrie's mother, Mr. Johnson again drove around to the camp. He was letter-carrier, express-agent, and generally accommodated the public of B—. This morning he drove a long cart on which was strapped a piano.

"Do you know why that man is bringing a piano here, Margaret?" asked Guthrie.

"Yes, I asked him yesterday to bring it up. I looked at it the day I was in Roden and learned about the rent."

Meanwhile Mr. Johnson was backing up to the piazza.

"Yes, sirr-ree," he said as the cart touched the edge of the floor. "I looked at that yisterday, and I thought it were jist about as high as my cart." He wheeled the upright piano where Margaret directed.

When he had gone she opened it and touched the keys tenderly.

"Margaret," said Guthrie, seriously, "are you a millionairess? If you are not, I am afraid you are going farther than you ought. I am fond of music, but don't wish you to go beyond your means to indulge me."

"No, I am hardly a thousand-heiress. Perhaps it would be better for me to tell you all about myself, then you can understand and advise me."

"I should like very much to have you tell me, if you don't mind; but I feel it is rather the proper thing for me to divulge first,—that is, if Pallam has not told all there is to tell."

"I don't believe he told me all, and I would much rather hear it from you."

"Well, I will tell first, as the children say. When I was nine years old, my father died.

He had lingering consumption for years, but to within two years of his death he continued to work. He was a bookkeeper in a factory in town, and when he died I went into the same factory as bobbin-boy. I had been kept in school until then, and afterward mother taught me evenings. A playmate of mine came in every night to tell us what the lessons for the next day were to be, so I kept with my class except that I did rather more than was required, as mother was ambitious and exacting as to my standing. I solved the problems in my mind; mother wrote out rules which I tucked in my pocket and studied while at work, so was fed and happy in both mind and body.

"I finished the grammar school at thirteen. The next year mother kept me reviewing and studying such things as came within her range of knowledge, but, not being satisfied, asked the minister to give me evening studies in a high-school course. This year I remember as the most important of my life up to that time, as I then began to pay off the mortgage on our home. My wages had been increased, and mother took in fine sewing as before, so we felt very prosperous; but it was a long pull, for I was twenty-two before the mortgage was finally lifted and the home our own. I was then still studying with the minister, for I felt the stimu-

lus kept me from sinking to the dead level of my work. I never knew how far I progressed with him, as the work was not classified; but about this time he began to advise me to take up some professional study. Mother would have been pleased if I had favored the ministry, but I did not feel equal to that. For one reason, some one had given me an old violin when I was about twelve years old, and it had been my recreation so long, and I cared for it so much, I did not wish to give it up; and at Wyndal a fiddling minister would have been out of the question. So I began to study law with the lawyer who looked after the interests of the mill, but as he could give me only an hour or two three evenings a week, my progress was rather slow.

"I did not allow mother to do any sewing after this, as I had begun to save a little money, but it was very little, for the old home had been neglected and it took quite a bit to put it in good condition. There was nothing new in my life until I was twenty-eight, just six years ago. Then Mr. Henson said I was ready to be admitted to the bar, but owing to a New Hampshire law I could not do so unless I could show I had passed a certain time at the study of law to the exclusion of everything else. This was a great disappointment to me, as Mr. Henson

had decided to leave Wyndal, and I had felt sure that I could have some of his work. He advised me to take the required time at Boston University Law School. This I couldn't do on my financial standing, so went to Boston and secured a position as janitor of a family hotel near Beacon Hill. I took this as a small apartment was furnished to the janitor, and I did not wish to leave mother alone in Wyndal. I was obliged to study little, so my class work left plenty of time for my duties. I stayed on until I took my degree, but on my return to Wyndal I found a flourishing young lawyer established in Mr. Henson's place. There was nothing for me to do but to go back to the factory until I could see my way clear to open an office.

"When I bought the mine of George Hanscomb—it was he who kept me in the track of the studies at the grammar school—it left us in rather reduced circumstances. Last year I began to cough, remembered my father and determined to get rid of the mine. You know the rest,—now it is your turn."

"Mine will seem so tame. Hadn't I better wait? I know you must be tired."

"No, let me hear it now. I want to know if we must send the piano back to-morrow."

"It seems strange, but I was just your age when *my* father died. He was a doctor in the

village where we lived. He was thrown from a carriage and killed instantly. I fancy we were in rather straitened circumstances, although I knew nothing about it until I had finished school. Mother had spent a good deal on my music, hoping at first to make a musician of me, but I did not wish to make music a grind by teaching it constantly. I began to teach in the primary school when I was eighteen. Mother had confided to me that we had nothing left but our home and I was as happy as a queen, for I realized I was helping to care for her. I kept on with my music, playing the organ in church, which brought in a trifle. That was my life for eight years, and such busy, happy years. Then mother died, and I felt I couldn't stay on in the old home, so sold it. That gave me, with the small amount we had saved, three thousand dollars. I went to Boston and secured a position on a paper. Years before, in a freak of wanting to do something new, I had exchanged music lessons with a girl in our town for shorthand lessons. This knowledge served me to good purpose, and I did the society news for that paper for three years, in fact, until I left there last April."

"Why did you leave?" asked Guthrie, rather troubled at her narrative.

"A year ago, I got restless," she answered.

"I seemed to miss mother more than ever, and knew I must do something to keep me from the blues, so began to get interested in the stock market. I had heard it talked of more or less by people connected with the paper. I took everything I possessed, about four thousand dollars, and put it into stocks. I kept hard at work, or I should have been very anxious, as I soon realized how foolish I had been; but stocks kept going up, and when I sold I had made several thousand dollars. I had nearly thirteen thousand and at once invested it, after asking advice, in reliable bonds from which I get four hundred and sixty dollars a year. I knew I must not be tempted into such a thing again. That, with my grab-bag keeps me going until I want to settle down to work."

"Your grab-bag? What is that?"

"Oh, I write a squib for some paper or magazine now and then, and receive a check,—sometimes more, sometimes less."

"I wonder why you left Boston last April," mused Guthrie.

Margaret sighed. "I got tired of people. I seem rather vagrant in my tendencies, don't I?"

"No, I think I understand. I used to have dreams and visions of seeing the world, but my fancies never got to the boiling pitch. I am too slow-going but I enjoyed the dreams."

"But you never get tired of people, do you?"

"I don't know that I have ever thought if I do or not. Now about the piano. Does your conscience tell you that you may keep it?"

"Yes, everything has come from my grab-bag thus far, and it isn't quite empty yet."

Chapter V

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

One afternoon Margaret was playing softly something from Chopin. Guthrie was sitting in his favorite attitude—his feet on the piazza railing. Save for the soft notes of the piano, all was silence. Suddenly a young girl with flying hair and very rosy cheeks appeared, coming down the north side of the tents. She came up on the piazza in a very unceremonious manner.

"You are Mrs. Guthrie, are you not?" she asked composedly. "I am Miss Curtis. I heard that you had had a piano sent up, and I am just dying to play duets with some one. Haven't you some we can play?"

Margaret surveyed her with some surprise.

Guthrie hearing, kept his eyes closed and appeared to be sleeping.

"Did I disturb him," inquired the girl, in a loud whisper.

Margaret smiled. "I am not sure if you did or not, neither am I sure that I have any duets you will like." But in a moment she felt less critical. So young, she thought, I'll indulge her—and so brought out the music.

"Take your choice, my dear; which part will you play?"

"Second, I think, to this."

They arranged their seats at the piano and began.

"How well you play," commented Miss Curtis, after a few minutes. "It's fun—don't you think?—this making our hearts beat at the same time. Oh, it is so good to find some one who can do something just right, who has some jingle! I have a nurse here with me who is the most stupid old owl you ever saw. And to add to the melancholy, Aunt Sarah has come. It seems sometimes as though I should just fly out of my skin. And when I want to fly, or dance, or play like this,—just make things go,—Miss Belcher will say in her old stiff way, 'You had better play a game of dominoes, hadn't you, or lie down and rest.' "

"Are you ill, that you need a nurse?" asked Margaret.

"I'm nervous," she pouted, "and I have trouble with my lungs, or that is what the doctor in New York said. The old frog out here says they're getting all right, but I don't believe it. I cough something awful part of the time." She emitted a hollow bark, apparently just as a sample.

"Oh, but this does me good! Let's play

something with a *real* jingle. You know them. You find one."

Margaret's selection seemed to suit Miss Curtis; her hands made expressive flourishes every time she raised them from the keys, and her little body kept time in an exhilaration of ecstasy.

"There's Old Hundred!" she cried as they struck the last note. "Good-by, I'm taking a vacation from the old maids," and she ran to the south side of the piazza and flew up the path on that side of the tents.

"Precocious youth," remarked Guthrie, opening his eyes.

"I should think so," replied Margaret. "It isn't nursing she needs, it's a spanking. That must be the nurse coming around the turn. How did she see her?"

"She is evidently a far-sighted young woman."

The person came up to the piazza. "Will you excuse me," she asked in a way that reminded Margaret of "you had better play a game of dominoes now, hadn't you?" "Has a young lady been here this afternoon?"

Margaret laughed. "I hardly know what you would call her,—young lady, child or sprite. She has been here and gone. Won't you come up and rest for a little while. I fancy you are Miss Belcher. I am Mrs. Guthrie, and this is my husband."

"Yes, you had better rest," approved Guthrie. "You might as well try to follow a whirlwind as that young article."

Margaret seemed to see the self-conscious stiffness slip away from Miss Belcher.

"Yes, I know that," she said earnestly. "I only wish I could stop following her for good and all; she's enough to spoil a saint."

"Perhaps that is your test of sainthood, Miss Belcher. Don't let her spoil you; just don't mind too much."

"I try to make excuses for her youth every minute of my life, but I know perfectly well it will be as easy to take care of her now as when she is sixty."

"Don't stay with her until then to prove it," smiled Margaret. "I am going to leave you with Mr. Guthrie for a few moments. He will give you some good advice, perhaps."

As she moved away, Miss Belcher thought she had never seen so beautiful and graceful a woman.

Guthrie asked if the child had not been indulged too much.

"Oh, yes," replied Miss Belcher. "Her mother hasn't the least control over her. I am sure I can't see what they will ever do with her if she gets well. Every one at the hotel just laughs at her pranks. Perhaps I am unjust, but it

seems to me that they are simply spoiling her, spending money on her as they do."

"Money covers a multitude of sins," said Guthrie, "but we will drink to the lack of it," he added as Margaret placed a tea-tray on the table.

Miss Belcher had not felt so like a Christian for weeks. There was no spirit of condescension in the entertainment, and she began to sip her tea with a most comfortable spirit of complacency.

"Why, how delightful! Here is Mr. Fairchild. I suppose you and Miss Belcher have met before," said Margaret, as Fairchild suddenly appeared.

"Yes," responded Fairchild, heartily. "She has been the greatest consolation I have had here, for I always think her lot harder than mine, because, you see, she cannot sight the end of her misery. But don't get downhearted, Miss Belcher; it will come some day."

Margaret thought for a moment that Miss Belcher sat a trifle straighter after Fairchild's entrance, but as he rambled on pleasantly she unbent and joined in the laugh when he described the inmates of the Tubercular Sanatorium.

"Guthrie, did you ever have a chance to see the different kinds of people in a hotel for the

feeble? Now Miss Belcher and I are one kind—the best kind, of course. Dear Mrs. May, when she dies, will be an extinct specie, but that may never occur, although she is anticipating the event at present. Miss Thornton is rather a more common kind; nice, you know, and sweet, and so sorry or so glad for everything. Then there is Mrs. Randal, who is, as far as I can ascertain, a composite descendant of every Mayflower name except Bradford,—that name isn't kneaded in yet. And I think Miss Craig will figure well as a distinctive type. She flourishes a lorgnette, and is very English, you know,—has the air of feeling that this country, all put together, reminds her of a first-year kindergarten, but she will try to tolerate it as well as she can. Isn't that a true picture, Miss Belcher?"

"I should say it is," replied Miss Belcher, with spirit.

"You perceive that Miss Belcher and I see this play in the same light, only she turns it to tragedy, while I regard it as comedy. Take it 'aisy,' Miss Belcher; it is the better way."

"Yes, I know that perfectly well. I just feel like telling them they are all old geese."

"Why don't you," asked Fairchild. "It would establish the fact that you have ideas all your own. Nothing takes with the world like in-

dividuality,—makes you stand out from the common lot, gives you perspective, so to speak."

"I feel as though I stand out from the common lot when Miss Craig stares at me through her lorgnette, and Mrs. May bows as if she had a stiff neck, and Mrs. Randal does not speak at all."

"I will tell you what I will do, Miss Belcher. Incidentally, I will ask you if you have been able to save any of the Bradford relics—let me see, how shall I put it?—or have the other descendants got them all."

"Mrs. Randal will feel she has found the Mayflower's missing link, won't she," laughed Margaret.

"No, thank you; I will do nothing of that kind. I will live up, or rather down, to what I am; I don't crave Mrs. Randal's smiles under any condition, certainly not under false pretenses," replied Miss Belcher.

"But it would beat an orchestra seat at a first performance! I haven't many enjoyments coming to me during the rest of my life. Can't you indulge me in this?" said Fairchild.

The reference to his limited career shocked his hearers for a moment, but he had no idea of making any one wear gloom for him.

"That is taking an unfair advantage, I know, but really, Guthrie, do you think it would be

anything out of the little path of rectitude to try this bit of reform on the birth-proud and purse-proud old ladies?"

"Well," replied Guthrie, dryly, "I don't imagine, from what you say, that the old ladies could be damaged much by it; but I agree with Miss Belcher,—it is better to appear what you are."

"Do you mean," asked Margaret, quickly, "that you do not believe in living under any false pretenses?"

Fairchild discerned a note of anxiety, and answered before Guthrie could speak.

"Why, Mrs. Guthrie, it is no false pretense if a man does not disclaim what he is. If he says nothing, that is his own affair—no pretense whatever."

Margaret looked somewhat uncertain.

"If you will pardon me, Mrs. Guthrie, for making rather a shocking illustration, I will give you an example of what I mean. I occasionally have a touch of gout; I don't assert that I haven't gout, but if I control my foot so that it does not limp, how is any one to know about it?"

"Not unless the other fellow steps on it," remarked Guthrie.

"Yes," laughed Fairchild; "then I should speak. That is what Miss Belcher threatens

to do if I refer to her honored ancestors; but would you, really? What would you say?"

"Why, I should say I had never heard of the Bradfords."

"That would be a worse fib than just a polite 'No' to my question."

"Then I would say they were no kin of mine."

"Well," smiled Fairchild, sadly, "I don't see much good at peddling Balm of Gilead, so you will be obliged to go on hating Mrs. Randal and the rest, instead of enjoying all the admiration you could inspire."

"I must go," exclaimed Miss Belcher, "or I shall not have Miss Thornton's admiration."

"She will be so *very*, *very* sorry if you are late," said Fairchild.

Miss Belcher laughed a hearty, natural laugh.

"That woman is all right at heart," remarked Fairchild, as she disappeared around the turn in the road, "but she is going to be badly soured if she is long situated as she is now. It seems a pity she cannot efface *herself* a trifle so as to see the humorous things about her."

"I suppose she feels that she is being pretty thoroughly effaced by the others," said Guthrie.

"Of course. That reminds me of a man I called on in Denver the last time I went down to see my doctor. He says, if a man can learn the art of effacing himself perfectly, he is above

the most pointed word-shaft in the world. He's a fine fellow himself,—comes from Boston; I knew him back there in the old days. I asked him this: 'Bert,'—his name is Bert Arnold—'did you ever see it done?' He replied, 'Not till death do us part from these bodies.' "

"Bert Arnold, did you say," exclaimed Guthrie. "He was at the Boston University Law School when I was there."

"Were you at the B. U.?"

"Yes."

"That is strange. You must know a number of men I have known more or less. Did you know Haze Floyd?"

When the name was spoken, Margaret looked up quickly, excused herself and went to the kitchen.

"Yes, I knew him," answered Guthrie, coloring. "That is, I—I knew him to the extent of blacking his boots the first year I was there."

"Bravo, Guthrie! I like that!" exclaimed Fairchild, extending his hand. "I want to bow down when a man effaces himself in that way and is honest to his soul. Bert Arnold never knew you well, or he wouldn't have said, 'Till death do us part.' "

Guthrie laughed. "To tell you the truth, I had rather plead guilty to blacking Haze Floyd's boots for a nickel, than to being his friend for nothing."

"You are right. If ever there lived a mean man, he is that man. He ought not to be at large. It has always seemed strange to me that such a contemptible soul should be housed in such an attractive body. He is mighty attractive in looks, you know. A classmate of mine, Winter Hayward, used to say he was a menace to womanity. He used to come out to Cambridge when we were there and boast of his conquests,—he had lived as a boy in Winter's home town."

"Have you seen him recently?" asked Guthrie.

"No; the last time I saw him was a little more than a year ago. Winter and I were on the Ave. and met him. He began telling us about a beautiful woman who had scorned him and swearing to get even with her. After he had gone on, Winter said, 'I would like to see that man behind the bars.' Mrs. Guthrie," Fairchild exclaimed as Margaret returned to the piazza, "why don't you send me home? It is almost six o'clock."

"We should like it never to be six, if it means you must go," said Margaret.

"My wife intends that as a compliment," said Guthrie. "She really does not want Joshua to hold the sun, I think."

Fairchild laughed. "I am inclined to believe she would want both Josh and me to move on after a time."

Chapter VI

THE BRADFORD ANCESTORS

The sun had sunk from sight, while the moon was casting slanting shadows before every object in its path. Margaret had joined Guthrie on the piazza and was drinking in the silent, subtle beauty of the scene.

"Why, here is Mr. Fairchild!" she exclaimed as a figure came in view from the north path. She noticed his slow and somewhat feeble movements, and had a chair close to the steps in readiness for him.

"You see I am obeying orders," he said. "I was told not to walk to-day, and I have not been able to keep my feet quiet for a moment."

"Why do you do it?" asked Margaret. "But we are very glad to see you, even if you are not good to yourself. And here is Miss Belcher. We haven't seen her since you went away," she added, as Miss Belcher appeared from the south path.

Fairchild had seated himself, panting, but when he heard Miss Belcher's name he gasped: "Mrs. Guthrie, can't you hide me? I am afraid of my life. It is all the life I have just now, and such as it is, I don't dare trust it to Miss Belcher."

"Don't come too near, Miss Belcher," admonished Guthrie. "Fairchild is frightened."

"Frightened! I should think he ought to be frightened. He has been and dug up some of my Bradford ancestors and laid them at Mrs. Randal's feet."

"And I suppose you returned them to him, marked 'Unknown and Uncalled For,'" said Margaret.

"Why, Mrs. Guthrie, it was just impossible to say a word. Anything I could have said would have put him in the wrong light. Mr. Fairchild, I can't stand it. Mrs. Randal passed me her very own salt four times to-night!"

"Thinks you are worth preserving now, doesn't she?" panted Fairchild.

"Do tell us all about it," said Margaret. "I am anxious to know how Mr. Fairchild dared venture."

"You have more breath than I, Miss Belcher," said Fairchild. "Will you please narrate the whole startling affair? Only deal with me as gently as you can."

"Well, to begin, I haven't seen Mr. Fairchild, until last night, since the day I was here. Miss Thornton has been to Denver, and requested that Miss Curtis's meals should be served in her room while she was away. Last night, when Miss Thornton got back and we all went

to the table, I heard people asking Mr. Fairchild about Denver, so I suppose he has been away too. The people all welcomed Miss Curtis back to the table, and most of them bowed in a stiff-necked way to me, but Mrs. Randal did not even look at me. The first moment things were quiet, so that every one could hear distinctly, Mr. Fairchild said, 'By the way, Miss Belcher, I met Major Somebody-or-other in Denver the other day, and you will be surprised to know he is anxious to find out if you were able to save any relics from your Bradford ancestors.' He did not wait for me to answer, but kept right on talking about the value of family relics. Before he had finished, Mrs. Randal turned to me and asked if I had descended from the Bradfords. I could not answer her without interrupting Mr. Fairchild, so I did not reply."

'There is where you played your best card," said Fairchild. "Nothing like a little snub to make people appreciate you."

"But what can I say, if she asks again when I cannot pretend not to hear?"

"Oh, just tell her you do not care to discuss your ancestors with strangers."

"That's great!" exclaimed Miss Belcher. The prospective pleasure in being a trifle impertinent to Mrs. Randal seemed too delicious to be resisted.

"'Vice is a monster of so *frightful* mien,'" quoted Guthrie.

"'Yet seen too oft,'" anticipated Fairchild. "But Miss Belcher hasn't had even one glimpse of a real Ananias story. I told her that she would be surprised if she knew Major Garland had asked those questions, and I think she would have been. Don't try to stir up her New England conscience, Guthrie, so that she will lose this bit of high light from her life."

"I am going before any one tempts me to change my mind," said Miss Belcher, decidedly. "It doesn't seem to me now that there can be anything wrong in telling Mrs. Randal that I do not care to discuss the matter with her, for you see," she added seriously, "it is perfectly true, I don't."

"That is right, Miss Belcher; go ahead. I, as your spiritual adviser, instruct you that it is your religious duty to use this means to head Mrs. Randal in the right direction," approved Fairchild.

"I often think," mused Fairchild, when they were all seated after exchanging adieus with Miss Belcher, "that Nasby voiced my ideas when he said, 'What fools we mortals be!' for we certainly are queer beings. My associates in misery up at the house, for example. We

are all derelicts, so to speak, excepting Miss Thornton, Miss Belcher, and possibly Miss Curtis, but we are carrying pretty full sail of earthly characteristics. When you get down to serious thinking, isn't it strange we live in such narrow pens? Some of us get so inflated because one of our thousand ancestors happened to do something out of the ordinary. Others feel the same degree of importance because they alone, without the influence of any forebears, have pulled themselves up to some glittering pinnacle that so dazzles the mind's eye that they forget their especial bit of sparkle isn't going to shine forever."

"But sometimes, Mr. Fairchild, we lay hold of the flimsy things, like ambition, pride and the so-forths, just to keep ourselves from falling off the edge of all the instability of life," remarked Margaret.

"Into the slough of despondence?" queried Fairchild, smiling. "Yes, I fancy that is true many times; but the kind of person who does that, isn't the same as the man who walks the earth thanking God he is not like other men. We often, I am sure, cling to foolish trifles as mind-preservers, or to keep hope afloat, at the same time realizing the unreality of life, as Guthrie and I are doing at the present time. We are enjoying all the beauty of this

scene, yet knowing in all probability we shall not see the old moon full many times more. Where shall we be, Guthrie, when this wonderful light shines in October?" He spoke with a touch of expectancy, of hope in his tone.

"I don't know," replied Guthrie, gravely. "I don't seem to have very defined ideas of a future, but I was brought up to believe in one."

"I think it isn't a matter of religious training," remarked Fairchild, "because mine was mixed; but I want a future, not because *I* want to live again, but I want to see my friends. To see my mother makes me perfectly reconciled to dying. It seems very strange if there is no future. You and I are here to-day, but in a few months we shall not be. It seems as though we must be somewhere, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I believe we shall be. That is as far as I have ever gone. You see, I can't arrange it, so I leave it."

"Yes, perhaps it is better to leave it that way, but my imagination keeps me conjecturing things. I like to think my mother is waiting for me, not in some remote region, but close by me here. I know if it were possible she would."

"That is a pleasant idea. I think I could not ask for a better heaven than to be allowed to stay near those I care for."

"I am questioning," continued Fairchild, "if

any of the mysteries we are wondering about here will be revealed to us. I have always wanted to know the real facts about the start of everything. I can almost see you and me wide-eyed, mouths agape, listening to the wonders of the primer class. I wish, Guthrie, we might both rest out there where that strong shaft of light touches the spot of sand so tenderly—Mrs. Guthrie, I have been a brute!" he exclaimed penitently, glancing toward Margaret.

She was sitting in the full light of the moon; her face looked ghastly in its frame of dark hair. She turned her head and looked at him strangely.

"Please forgive me; I didn't think," he pleaded earnestly. The petition was accented by short hard coughs.

"Why, there is nothing to forgive," she replied in a clear steady voice; but a tremulous sigh escaped her that she tried hurriedly to cover with disconnected protests to his apologies.

"Why, I understand perfectly. I think it is better to talk; please don't stop."

"I think I have said enough unless I say something better. I ought not to have been personal. I was looking at things in a general way when I began, but like all small minds I narrowed down, and I ought not to have included Guthrie, for I think perhaps he is improving."

"Don't apologize," said Guthrie, hastily. "Mrs. Guthrie understands. She knows there is no hope."

"Well, let us surprise her," exclaimed Fairchild, gaily. "Let us get on a Christian Science platform. Who knows what it may do for us!"

Guthrie thought he saw a startled look pass over Margaret's face.

"I am afraid," he said smiling, "that it would be something like Bryan's old platform,—only one plank, and that not strong enough to hold hope."

Fairchild continued to come to the tents almost daily through the summer. He promised to come every day if Margaret would play to them.

"Isn't this almost as good as heaven, Guthrie?" Fairchild asked one day.

"I think it suits me quite as well," replied Guthrie, rather seriously.

"I can't say that," returned Fairchild, "I think heaven must be flavored with the same kind of peace, and the flavoring goes a long way in things; but I believe there will be something to satisfy all our best needs. Don't you think there is something lacking in nearly every life here? A person may seem to have everything, but I fancy the cases are rare where there is peace and content at all times."

"It has seemed to me you might be a person of perfect content if you but had your health," said Margaret.

Fairchild smiled. "I am very glad if I have given that impression, but happiness is from within, not from without. Yet I presume I have been a fairly happy man; but I cannot truthfully say I am always perfectly satisfied. Life has never seemed quite so abundant and beautiful to me since some of my friends left it. That, to my mind, is where heaven comes in. No vacant, desolate lots in our fields of affection; everything beautifully rounded and bright. It will seem like going to Grandmother's for Thanksgiving—everybody there, and your heart filled with love and peace for them all."

"Speaking of grandmothers, has it never occurred to you, Fairchild, that we must all have quite a number there?" asked Guthrie.

"Yes, bless them. I don't know how it will be arranged, but I shall not turn my back on one. This perhaps sounds profane to you, Mrs. Guthrie; to me it does not seem so. In my heart it means peace and love for all—no discords, nothing existing but kindness."

"Do you suppose every one will be in that frame of mind or soul there?" asked Margaret.

"Well, it will hardly be heaven if there is discontent. Let us hope that discontent and fashions will stay here."

"Fairchild," asked Guthrie, suddenly, "would you, if you had the power given you to choose, go on as you seem to be going now, or would you turn back and stay here longer?"

"I would go on," said Fairchild, without hesitation.

Guthrie rose from his chair and paced back and forth on the piazza. "That is the better way to look at it," he remarked.

"Of course I can understand you would feel differently," said Fairchild, glancing toward Margaret.

Guthrie paused. "It is my business to move on," he said quietly.

Chapter VII

THE PROSPECT OF RECOVERY

Toward the latter part of August, Fairchild's strength commenced to wane. He was unable to get down to the tents, so Guthrie began to go up to the little hospital hotel to see him, Margaret sometimes accompanying him. She noticed he walked with more apparent strength, but she seemed to feel it was a temporary matter, as she had often heard that in such illnesses one frequently had more strength some days than others. One afternoon she had been making a particular kind of broth for Guthrie that Fairchild during the summer had seemed to enjoy, and thought she would take some up to him. Guthrie had already made his visit and was resting on the piazza. She slipped away without disturbing him, as she knew she would be gone but a few moments.

She found Fairchild sitting on his balcony.

"I am very glad to see you, Mrs. Guthrie, for I want to talk to you about your husband. I don't want to raise any false hopes in Guthrie by speaking to him about it, but do you know, I believe he is going to pull through. Do you

notice how differently he looks, and he is gaining flesh wonderfully."

"No, I had not noticed it," answered Margaret slowly.

"I only hope it is true," continued Fairchild. "He wants to live, and he has so much to live for."

"Yes," said Margaret, rousing herself. "He will be very glad to get well for his mother's sake." She was too surprised to make pretenses. She left as soon as she could get away.

Fairchild was puzzled by her conduct, but that evening the Guthries came together to see him. Margaret had in the intervening hours schooled herself to the situation; Fairchild was pacified, and thought that the idea of Guthrie's possible recovery coming to her suddenly had rendered her speechless with hope.

After the Guthries had returned to the tents, and Guthrie had retired, Margaret stood in her door and gazed into space. She wrung her hands nervously, tortured by the thought of how he must hate her, and of how she could get away. But when she remembered he had no money, and would doubtless soon be the wreck he was in the spring, she felt tied, and the fetters gave her extreme agony. When she recalled his looks in April, and made comparison with his present appearance, she was convinced he

was rapidly recovering. And she remembered the remark he had made a few weeks earlier—that it was his business to move on—and wondered if he realized he was getting better. If he only had money, she thought, he could send for his mother to come and care for him, but even that thought was misery to her.

The next morning when Guthrie returned from his visit to Fairchild he came up to the tents with a firm step.

"Margaret," he said, "Fairchild wants me to go to Denver to-morrow if I am able."

"Are you strong enough to go?" asked Margaret, quickly.

"I am too strong, Margaret," he replied with an air of guilt, as though he would break the news to her gently.

"No one can be too strong," she answered evenly. "But you cannot go and come to-morrow."

"No, I shall be gone three days. Miss Belcher can come down nights, and says that she will be glad to do so."

"I shall not mind staying alone."

"But I cannot allow that," he said masterfully. "I should not go for any other reason, but Fairchild hasn't his affairs quite settled, and it is necessary for some papers to go to Denver before the 19th of September, and

to-morrow will be the 18th. You don't object to Miss Belcher, do you?"

"Oh, no, indeed; that will be all right."

"Fairchild wants us to go up this afternoon, as he needs your advice about selecting something from his possessions for Miss Belcher."

When Margaret asked Fairchild that afternoon how he was feeling, he replied that he felt a little like Winter Hayward's Sambo—as though he had "ginerl 'bility."

"I must tell you about him," he continued. "One night along in March or April, the last year we were in college, Hayward and I had been to Boston to see Bert Arnold. Shortly after leaving Bert's we met an old negro who seemed to be in trouble. The old fellow was turning his pockets inside out and mumbling to himself.

"Winter stopped and said, 'What's the matter, Sambo?'

" 'I'se done los' sumpin' valable to me,' he said.

" 'What was it?' inquired Winter.

" 'Twas jus' a paper with a gemman's name on it, an' my Mr. Archibald of Philidelphy done say he's sure de fines' gemman in Boston.'

"I asked him if he couldn't *remember* the name.

" 'No, sar, not perzackly. It's jus' this way:

I can almos' recomember it, 'cause it's mos' perzackly lik' wat de doctor done say ailed my ole woman.'

"'Rheumatism?' asked Winter.

"'Oh, no; sure it was sumpin' sorter high-toned.'

"'Neuritis,' ventured Winter.

"'No, no; 'twa'n't nothin' new.'

"'Measles,' guessed Winter.

"'No, sar, it sure wa'n't any one thing; it was kinder ginerl. That's it!' he shouted. 'Ginerl 'bility,—kinder ginerl 'bility to have all kinds of aches, I s'pose.'"

Guthrie and Margaret laughed. "Well, did you find out the name?" asked Guthrie.

"Yes, that was easy. It was General Ache, and it was quite true,—no better gentlemen lives in Boston. But we knew that General Ache was in Europe with his family, so we mentioned the fact to Sambo. 'Hum,' he remarked, 's'pose he'll done get home befo' to-morrow night, won't he?'

"Winter took him to Cambridge and set him up in the bootblack business, where he prospered ever after, and was always called 'Hayward's Sambo.'

"I seem to have a 'ginerl 'bility' to trouble my friends. Here I am asking Guthrie to go to Denver to-morrow, and now I want to ask

you, Mrs. Guthrie, which of these books you think Miss Belcher might prefer. They are both supposed to have belonged to the Bradfords."

"But you do not wish to give these to any one outside of the family, do you?"

"I have no relations that I know very much about, and I haven't time to hunt them up. I think, as Miss Belcher has adopted the Bradfords, it is proper for her to have one of their books. Do you think she would prefer this to the other?"

"Yes, I think she would," Margaret replied after examining them.

"Guthrie," said Fairchild, "will you find Miss Belcher, if you can, and ask her to come up here?"

As soon as Guthrie was out of the room, Fairchild whispered, "Guthrie has promised me to see a doctor in Denver to-morrow, and to write me at once what he says."

"You will tell me as soon as you hear?"

"Why, certainly; but if the report is good, he will of course write you."

When Miss Belcher came in, Fairchild gave her the book, telling her its history. If you should feel disposed to do so, I shall be very glad to have you show it to Mrs. Randal. Don't say that I gave it to you; simply say it came to

you through one of the Bradford descendants."

"I am afraid Miss Belcher will feel more than half Bradford herself," remarked Guthrie.

"That will be the best thing in the world for her," replied Fairchild. "A little Mayflower salve will help to heal the wounds Mrs. Randal has inflicted."

"That is perfectly true," spoke up Miss Belcher, decidedly. She had been trying to express her gratitude for the book, between Fairchild's and Guthrie's run of talk, but when it came to a straightforward assertion she succeeded in expressing herself. "I don't seem to mind a thing she says, that is, I don't believe I should. She is so polite she doesn't give me a chance to get cross, but I *do* enjoy ignoring her."

"Ah, me!" sighed Fairchild. "If we could learn the art of not caring without the help of such a poisonous remedy."

"Please don't say such things," said Miss Belcher, bristling. "You will make me feel smaller than Mrs. Randal did. The feeling I have now isn't half so bad as the old one. That kept me riled all the time. Now I feel as though my ill-temper had been given a sedative, and perhaps after a time I may learn this wonderful kind of calmness you talk about."

"God bless you, I hope you may. There is

nothing better for all kinds of earthquakes than to take a stand on something above and beyond the earth, and calmly wait through the whole performance," murmured Fairchild.

"Those conditions must be reserved, Fairchild. You must understand that we are not all fortunate enough to have tickets to those high places," said Guthrie.

Fairchild closed his eyes. "Now I am going to speak like one having authority on the subject. I will take you, Guthrie, for example; you are not thin-skinned, you can stand my personal allusions.

"First, you are proud, proud as Lucifer, but not of your good looks, or of your ancestry, but of your honor. You would give your life to sustain this sense of honor in your own mind. You have petted and coddled the idea until it has become overgrown. Some people need to cultivate this tendency seriously, but you were born with too large a dose of it. Now just rid yourself of the thought that you must always make good everything you promise yourself. Just acknowledge to your soul you will do what comes within your reach, but you can't do stunts; then fold up this abnormal conscience of yours and rest."

Fairchild opened his eyes and glanced at Guthrie, who sat opposite, looking a trifle pale.

"I feel as though my soul had undergone a post mortem," he said smiling.

Fairchild sat on his balcony the larger part of the night. He could breathe better in an upright position. Between his naps his mind turned to Guthrie, and he mused to himself, "He is as close as an oyster, and as open as a book."

He recalled a remark Guthrie had made that morning—that he was eating more than he needed, and must stop it. He wondered if it were possible he was being influenced by the need of a life insurance he might be carrying. He had felt he was equal to making as great a sacrifice as that might mean.

Chapter VIII

AN OFFER FOR THE MINE

The morning after Guthrie had left for Denver, Margaret sat down to look matters squarely in the face. She kept coming back to the same point,—she couldn't desert him, and she couldn't stay. While her mind was in this turmoil, she saw a man approaching the tents from the north path; he came to the piazza and asked for Mr. Guthrie.

"Mr. Guthrie is away for a few days. Is there any message you would like to leave?" she asked.

"I came to see him about a mining claim he owns."

"Do you wish to see him in regard to buying it?" Margaret asked, her heart beating so violently the blood rushed to her face.

"Yes, I wanted to know his price. Do you know what he asks for it?"

"No," said Margaret cautiously. "I have never heard him mention any price. I only know he owns something of the kind."

"I have been looking it over with another

man, and we have decided to offer him seven thousand dollars for it."

The price mentioned had nearly taken Margaret's breath, but she tried to keep a calm front.

"I can't give you any idea of the price, but it is possible that a friend of his, who is stopping at the hotel, may be able to do so. Would you like to see him?"

"Yes, I guess I will, for we want to find out as soon as possible."

"I will go up with you. I am not sure that he will be able to see you, as he is quite ill, and I do not want him disturbed if he is not equal to it."

Margaret told Fairchild the main points in the case, before the man was admitted.

"I am glad Guthrie is away," said Fairchild, "for I am afraid he would sell for the first offer. Come up to-night or in the morning, and I will tell you my success as a financier."

Margaret went home, but there was no more meditation; she began quietly packing her trunk, managing to keep busy until evening. She had decided not to see Fairchild until the morning, as then she could hear the report from the doctor.

She passed a restless night, and rising early, waited impatiently until she could go to the hotel. The moment she saw Fairchild she

knew from his beaming face something of what he had to tell her.

"Mrs. Guthrie," he began, a jubilant ring in his voice, "you will say that blessings never come singly. Yesterday, before that man left, he made an offer of twenty-two thousand dollars for the mine. There is evidently another party after it, so if Guthrie will sell for that amount, he will close the deal at once, and pay cash. He is to see him on Thursday. Then this morning I had this letter from Guthrie, in which he says Dr. Spaulding tells him there is no reason why, with care, he will not be a strong, healthy man. The lung is healing finely."

Margaret had felt hysterical, and the tears came easily to her eyes.

"It is lovely, isn't it?" she said, as she gratefully shook his hand.

She went home, finished her packing, and attended to various duties about the tents.

That evening Miss Belcher wondered at her silence, but she did not know that Margaret was trying to decide how to tell her that she was going away the next afternoon. An hour later the problem was easily solved. Some one had driven over to Roden for the mail, and stopped with a letter for Margaret. As she opened it in Miss Belcher's presence, the thought came to her. She glanced through it quickly and

saw it was in reference to some music she had written about.

"Miss Belcher," she said suddenly, her eyes still on the letter, "I shall have to go away to-morrow."

"You haven't had bad news, have you?" inquired Miss Belcher.

"No, not bad, but I am obliged to go, and if you will excuse me, I will write a note to leave for Mr. Guthrie." She did not wish to be questioned further.

She went to her room and wrote:

"Dear Mac,—You cannot know the misery I feel when I realize what an injury I have done you. I am going away. Please don't try to find me. You can easily get a divorce, as I am leaving you, but will you please explain it all to mother, as I cannot bear to have her think ill of me.

I am so glad you are going to get well, and happy in your good fortune.

Penitently yours,

MARGARET."

On Guthrie's return the following night, he went to see Fairchild before going to the tents. He looked pale and haggard.

"Why, Guthrie, you are worse, you are sick!" exclaimed Fairchild.

"Am I?" asked Guthrie. "You and Dr. Spaulding do not agree; however, I believe I have more faith in your diagnosis than in his."

"Didn't you believe what he told you, and what you wrote to me?"

"Yes, I was a trifle intoxicated by what he said for about an hour, and I wrote you during that time, but I have had a reaction in my faith, and I do not think it possible for me to live very long."

"In the name of Heaven, man, what do you mean? You have gained flesh constantly for the last month. No one could help noticing the improvement. Don't get downhearted now, and lose it all."

"Didn't you tell me, Fairchild, not long ago, that you would not turn back if you could? I may feel the same way."

"You do not mean to say, Guthrie, that you do not value life!"

"Not enough to live it as I shall have to if I stay in this world."

"Guthrie, I believe you haven't eaten half enough since you left here. I am going to have a tray sent up, and see that you eat."

"Oh, no; I must go to the tents. Mrs. Guthrie will be expecting me. I came around this way because I wanted to ask you if you had told my wife what Dr. Spaulding said."

"Yes, I told her, and she was very happy. And Guthrie, I have some news for you. There will be a man here with twenty-two thousand dollars to offer you for your mining claim. Will you sell?"

"Are you serious, Fairchild!" Guthrie exclaimed. "Sell! Of course I shall sell, even if it were only two thousand. Does Margaret know?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, and she seemed delighted; but Mrs. Guthrie has been called away."

"Called away!" said Guthrie.

"Yes, Miss Belcher was down there last night, and said Mrs. Guthrie received a letter obliging her to go this afternoon. I imagined she was going to catch the Eastern express that leaves Roden at six. Didn't you meet her?"

"No," Guthrie replied briefly, looking at his watch. It was nearly six. He recalled a remark he had heard at the station before Roden, that there was a breakdown on the road farther west, and that the Western train would likely be an hour or two late.

"I will see you to-morrow morning," he said to Fairchild, hastily.

He hurried to the stable. The man who had been sent to drive him from Roden was leisurely folding up lap robes.

"Can you get me back to Roden in an hour?" Guthrie asked.

"Pretty swift gait for 'leven miles,—and the roads ain't extra fine, you know."

"Get me there as soon as you can, then. You can get a fresh horse, can't you?"

"Yes, and a good one; but an hour and a half is about the shortest time you could do it."

"Let's get started at once," said Guthrie, a trifle impatiently. "Come to the tents for me."

When they were on the road, Guthrie wondered why he was going. She has left like a nun, after finishing her deed of mercy, he thought with a pang of regret. He had been to the tents and found her note. It would be impossible for him to make the appeal that was in his heart, as he feared to again arouse her pity, and it was not pity he wanted. He made himself miserable by imagining the relief she doubtless felt in getting away. The man at his side proffered occasional remarks, but they were received in silence. He wondered what could have happened to change a man so completely in so brief a space, for Guthrie had seemed kind and had apparently tried to meet him on his own ground in conversation a short time before. He finally gave up the attempt to be social, and they drove on in silence.

Meantime Margaret had reached the station, to find that her train was delayed. She had

asked the man who had driven her to take a circuitous route, giving as a reason her wish to see some object of interest on the longer way.

The station was on the outskirts of the small town. As soon as it became known that the train would be late, the little group gathered to watch its incoming dispersed one by one; even the station agent, at last locking his private office, strolled toward the center of the village, and Margaret was left alone in the gathering dusk. It was a natural moment for painful reveries,—she saw Guthrie's return to the tents, heard him call her name, saw him groping about wonderingly. The mother pity of it all nearly suffocated her, and she went outside, where she could breathe better. If he had only cared—her heart cried in an agony of pain. She lost all account of time. Even the delayed train failed to awaken her, by any impatience, from her stupor of misery. A laugh rang out now and then from the village street a quarter of a mile away; voices calling back and forth, as though there were yet some cheer in the world, reached her ears; but a dog baying in the dark, far-off, and unsettled regions seemed a better accompaniment to her thoughts. It seemed to her that she had been sitting there forever, when she heard in the distance the rattle of

wheels. The station agent had returned with a few companions in his wake, making it evident that the time set for the train must be approaching. A carriage whirled up to the station. Margaret, sitting outside, hardly noticed it until Guthrie was close beside her.

"Couldn't you stay, Margaret?" he asked in a deep voice.

"Mac!" she exclaimed. "Mac!" There was almost a touch of hope in her tone. "Why, you ought not to be out after such a hard day."

"I couldn't let you go without seeing you," he said.

"Must you go?" he asked hoarsely, extending his hand.

She stepped back, trembling like a leaf.

"It is better," she replied.

He mistook her action and thought she repulsed him.

"Better for you," he said miserably.

"Better for us both," she replied.

The whistle sounded. The people were gathering on the platform.

"Margaret!" Guthrie cried almost desperately.

The brakeman, with the usual alertness after a delay, hurriedly assisted Margaret on the train, with little regard for farewells, and the engine puffed its decision to move on.

Margaret sank into her seat, with mixed

emotions. "Margaret!"—as Guthrie had spoken it—kept ringing in her ears.

It was pity, she thought in humiliation. "He has discovered how much I care."

Chapter IX

RISETON LIFE

Margaret dallied along on her journey, thinking she would stop in Chicago, but she felt restless and unsettled, and did not find a place to stay within her means, as the hotel recommended to her by ladies on the train was too expensive for her purse. In New York it was the same. She spent two days looking for newspaper work, but in a halfhearted, unexpectant kind of way. Finally she took the boat for Riseton, making up her mind to settle down to something when she got there. For New York seemed too big and soulless; she felt lost and craved the hominess of a smaller town.

She had never been in Riseton, but on her arrival there went about finding a home in a clear-headed and systematic manner. At the Christian Association she was told of a Mrs. Gordon who would make her comfortable in every way at a very reasonable price. She went there and was soon settled in a pleasant room. Although it was Saturday afternoon, she asked Mrs. Gordon about the leading newspapers, and decided to go to the one most highly recommended at once, for her courage was returning.

"Well," said the editor into whose office she had been shown, "if you are really on the line of society news, I think you must have been sent in answer to prayer. I will apply to the Boston —— for reference."

"I have a letter from Mr. J., if that will help you to decide now."

He glanced through the letter.

"That is all right," he said. "I think I will try you without further delay. The woman who has been doing this work, and picking up stray bits about town, was called away by some sickness or need in her family, and, although she has never been quite satisfactory, her loss just at present seemed almost a catastrophe. There is to be a great social event at Mrs. Hayward's next Thursday evening, and they want me to send some one up Monday afternoon to look the situation over with them, but I haven't any one on my staff equal to ladies' gowns and lots of other details; and the Haywards are rather particular to have the thing reported *just so*. Not overdone, you know, so as to seem vulgar, but they do not wish any nice little points missed. Major Lake of New York, has secured Lord Moreland to speak to their guests on 'Social Life in Scotland,' and they expect to meet him after the talk. It will of course be a great treat to their friends, and

I fancy," he added, lowering his voice, "rather an expensive treat, as Lord Moreland is not over here for social reasons, but to replenish his purse. Well, if you can go up Monday afternoon and talk the matter over with them, it will be a relief to my mind. They prefer to have their carriage come here for the person I send, so if you will be at the office about two-twenty, it will be all right. Now do you wish to talk about terms?"

"No, I would rather not, now. I simply want work, and you will be a better judge of that in a week or two."

"Very well. I am already congratulating myself on my good luck."

After two days of perfect rest Margaret felt hopeful. As she dressed very carefully for the interview, she wondered if Mr. Fairchild's friend could in any way be connected with this family of Haywards. She drove to the house in a comfortable carriage drawn by two high-stepping horses driven by a man in livery. A maid took her card, and in a few moments a lady, very gracious in manner, entered the room.

"I am Miss Hayward," she said, greeting Margaret. "I shall take charge of everything for Thursday night, so if you wish to ask any questions, you will consult me. Lord Moreland has kindly offered to give a little talk, then there

will be refreshments—which of course will be simple—and music. Now I hardly know what to say to you. Of course I shall give you a list of the people who accept. Then I will tell you as far as possible what will be worn by the family and our most intimate friends. I will try to have everything ready for you before you go Thursday night, for you know your article must be ready for the papers early, as Mr. Webster has promised to send it to the New York and Boston papers, and of course it would be simply horrible for it to come out a day or two after it is over. It would look as though it were fixed up, and we want to avoid any appearance of that kind. I think you will understand. We want it to seem simple, you know, but—but—

"Impressive," ventured Margaret.

"Yes. I think you will get the idea. Now in regard to the decorations, I hardly know what to say. I am sure they will be beautiful."

"Do you wish to specify what is used, or only mention it in a general way?"

"I am not quite sure. I will call my sister; perhaps she will advise."

Miss Jennie Hayward was formally introduced.

"Jennie, what do you think?" asked the elder sister. "Miss Armstrong wants to know what to say of the decorations. Is it better to simply

say they were beautiful, or to say they were principally greens and roses?"

"I am sure I don't know, Mary. Why don't you ask mother or Winter?"

"Why, Jennie, mother never likes to express an opinion, and Winter turns everything into ridicule."

"But Winter will tell you what he thinks about it."

So mother and Winter were summoned. Mother assumed the air of a spectator, and Winter inquired if his valuable opinion was needed.

"Yes, Winter," replied Mary, "and I want you to be serious about it."

Winter's face immediately became very grave.

"Do you think it would be better to say just what the decorations were, or say they were very beautiful?"

"You want to say what sounds the most swell, do you?" he asked seriously.

"Don't, Winter!" exclaimed Mary, impatiently. "You know perfectly well what I mean. I don't want it to sound as if we wanted to tell everything."

"And leave nothing to the imagination?" inquired Winter, innocently.

"I told you, Jennie, how it would be," cried Mary.

"Winter," said Jennie, imploringly, "can't you help Mary? She is having an awfully hard time arranging it all."

"Well now, Mary, what is it?" he asked in a businesslike way. "Just tell me any two, three or four ways you may say it, and I will tell you the one I should prefer, but I am not a composer."

"Well, I thought I might put it this way,—'The decorations were beautiful'; or this way,—'The decorations of greens and roses were beautiful."

"Wouldn't you like to say what kind of greens? They might think they were dandelions."

"They are going to be evergreens, mostly."

"Why not say evergreens? There is nothing in better taste, but why don't you ask Miss Armstrong's advice?"

"She asked mine, Winter."

"I wanted to get a general idea of how you wish it expressed."

"You wanted to know if we propose to have it expansive?" asked Winter, smiling at Miss Armstrong. "How would you say it if you were going to try to suit my sister?"

"There are many ways it might be said to sound simple."

"And effective," added Winter.

"Yes," Margaret replied. "How would something like this do? Let me see what kind of roses are to be used."

"There are to be lots of tea, but not wholly."

"You will have to go to the greenhouse, Miss Armstrong, and take an inventory," said Winter.

"Don't you think it would be better to name the prevailing kind? It would perhaps be more distinctive. You might say, 'The profusion of tea roses with evergreens was simple and beautiful.'"

"Yes," remarked Mary, "that is very good, except that it does not say they were everywhere. It might seem as though they were in just one room."

"Put in a parenthesis, Miss Armstrong, 'This means all over the house,'" said Winter.

"Don't, Winter! We haven't any too much time, and I want to get this all settled."

"How would this do: 'The entire house was simply and beautifully decorated with tea roses and evergreens?'"

"That is all right," replied Mary, with an expression of relief.

"Now about the music. We are to have a young girl here in town, who plays the violin beautifully, render two solos. Then we are to have an orchestra from ——. They are to be screened by palms and plants, and I want the

violinist to stand back of these also, but my brother feels that it would be more pleasing for her to be seen, as she is very pretty. But you see, we all knew her mother in the old days, and of course people know *her* somewhat, and it would make it horribly embarrassing, for no one could speak to her, of course, as it will be evident she is a paid musician; but to ignore her will hurt her, so, you see," she added virtuously, "it is best for her to be out of sight."

"Lord Moreland will think she is 'out of sight' if he sees her," remarked Winter.

Mary glanced scornfully at him, but he went coolly on.

"I agree with you perfectly, Mollie; it is better for her to be behind the palms. George Gould might see her and ask her if the ham he sold her mother got there all right. By the way, Miss Armstrong ought to hear that story."

"Don't, Winter! It is bad enough to have such barbarians in our midst without talking to every one about them."

"All right, Mollie, it goes down on record that the fiddle was kept out of sight; but we don't need to trouble Miss Armstrong with the phraseology of the music comments,—we can use home talent for that. Don't you think, Mother, that Miss Armstrong ought to see the house so as to get the lay of the land a bit?"

"I will show her about," said Mrs. Hayward, rising with dignity. She had been a trifle ignored concerning the arrangements, and felt she must claim her own.

As they passed out, Winter gave a low laugh. "Mother will take her to the kitchen and show her all the preserves she is rounding up for winter."

"Isn't she beautiful?" asked Jennie.

"Of a kind, I think she is," replied Mary.

"Of all kinds I think she is, Jennie," put in Winter.

"Why, you know, she seems," exclaimed the romantic Jennie, "like one of the people we hear of, who has had money and everything and lost it all."

"Yes, she does seem a little like that, doesn't she, Winter?" said Mary. "You know what I mean. She has rather a regal carriage, and being tall it gives her an air. Not that that signifies," she added, recalling her own unlofty height.

"No, I suppose it doesn't," agreed Winter. "Large and small potatoes all grow in the same earth, but Miss Armstrong seems to me just as God made her, not as though she had been forever pulling herself up by the roots to be planted in some unaccustomed soil." Winter spoke seriously for once, and Mary noticed the change.

"I hope you will not be getting any silly notions in your head, Winter. You know nothing whatever about her. She is probably a nobody."

"Probably," smiled Winter, his humorous mood back. "You know, Mollie, it would take more than perfection to come up to me,—that of course is your opinion, and you have always underestimated me."

"Hush!" said Mary, as Mrs. Hayward's and Margaret's voices sounded outside.

"Miss Armstrong," began Mary, as soon as they were in the room, "I feel that I should like to get the music settled. My brother believes in putting things off to the last moment, but I am sure we shall have enough to do at the end. I told you what we are to have. How will you mention it?"

"You said you are to have a violin solo. Do you wish to mention the name of the soloist?"

"Oh, no, indeed. She is no one in particular. She plays divinely, but her people have never been in society here—, at least, not since my recollection."

"My sister has rather Brahmaistic ideas, Miss Armstrong,—no rebirths into a different caste."

"Well," interrupted Mary, quickly. "I don't believe we are out of the caste the Lord placed us in, or that he expects us to associate with other castes here or in any other existence."

"Why, Mary! Poor old Grandpa Page would feel a trifle hurt, I am afraid, if he thought you were going to cut him in some Great Hereafter, just because he hoed corn here."

Mary looked disgusted. "Don't be ridiculous, Winter," she said. "I hope you will pay no attention to him, Miss Armstrong, and I trust you haven't his ideas."

"I try not to have ideas," said Margaret. "They are sometimes inconvenient."

"That is good," applauded Winter, "especially if you are careless and let them go off among your friends. Here is Dad. He has ideas, but he keeps them locked and bolted.

"Father, this is Miss Armstrong. She has come up to see us, so as to write the papers what kind of trousers you are to wear next Thursday night," added Winter.

"H'm," he said grimly, taking Margaret's hand, and smiling at her ludicrously. "She had better say how much the scrape is going to cost."

"That is great, father. That will attract more attention than all the flower-and-fiddle praise Miss Armstrong can get together. What would Grandfather Hayward have said if he could have seen the bills for this affair?"

"If he hadn't belonged to the church, he would have called me a particular kind of a fool. I am glad to meet you, Miss Armstrong," he added kindly, "but I can't stand the details."

Margaret arose at once.

"Don't be in a hurry, Miss Armstrong. I will ring for Tom to bring the carriage around. By the way, may I ride downtown with you?"

Margaret saw disapproval in Mrs. Hayward's and Mary's eyes.

"Why," she faltered, flushing, "I can't very well refuse in your own carriage."

"Of course you can't," agreed Winter.

"But perhaps Miss Armstrong prefers you not to go," protested Mary.

"But you know she has just said if she does she can't make it known, so I am all right."

"You have a beautiful home," remarked Margaret, as they passed out from the winding driveway.

"Yes, we are fairly well housed, but I sometimes think that animals of the wild feel more at home in the forest than in a circus parade."

"But don't you love the city? It is beautiful, I think." Margaret looked down on the broad river gleaming in the early October sunlight,—a touch of scarlet here and there on the opposite shore, with the mellow haze of autumn, made it indeed beautiful, while the attractive houses and well-kept lawns gave it a peaceful and homelike air.

"Oh, yes, I like the old town all right; in fact

I am quite daft on it. I lived in that white cottage we are going to pass in about ten seconds until I was eighteen, and my heart beats truer to that than to the pile of masonry up yonder." They both glanced back to the brownstone mansion standing in proud isolation, drawing its mantle and skirts of lofty elms and beautiful shrubbery rather back from contact with the more ordinary part of the city.

"Perhaps you agree with Ruskin that it is better to live in a cottage and be surprised at Warwick Castle than to live in Warwick Castle and have nothing to be surprised at."

"I am not sure it is surprises I am missing, but to me the establishment does not quite harmonize with the south end of the town. You haven't been there possibly. Webster said you are a stranger here."

"Yes, this is my first day out."

"There are places in this city where you would feel sad to see even a dog camp. By the way, where did Mary tell Tom to take you?" he asked, stopping short in his description of the city.

"Ten Mayrick Street."

"Why, that is Mrs. Gordon's place, isn't it?"

"Yes; I am boarding with her."

"That is good. She is a fine woman."

"You know her?"

"Yes, as Grandfather Hayward used to say, 'Man and boy, I have known her nigh onto thirty year.' "

"You speak as though your recollections date back somewhat."

"My acquaintance with Mrs. Gordon began with my first days of croup. I believe she saved my life once or twice and did various little favors of that kind for me. She grew up close to my father's old home, and those were the days when every one in the neighborhood was like brothers and sisters. Then she married and came here to live close to us, as you see. Her husband was not very successful in business, and she isn't at present in the swim, so to speak, but I have never heard that the deprivation has injured her morals. Will you say to her that I am going to call on her soon? And tell her, please, if you are at home I shall hope to see you."

"I will tell her," said Margaret, "and will also say to her that I shall be very glad to be in when you call."

"Thank you. Now, as I fancy we are two rather serious people, we know where we stand."

When Margaret opened the door of Mrs. Gordon's cottage, a voice called from the dining-room: "Aren't you chilly, Miss Armstrong? You had better come in and get warm before you go upstairs."

"Why, thank you, Mrs. Gordon; I haven't thought of being cold," said Margaret as she entered the dining-room, "but you look very cozy here, and the fire doesn't seem out of place."

"No, moving around as I do mornings, I seem to feel cold when I sit down to sew, and I don't like to start the furnace so early. It takes very little fire to keep this room warm, and it is the pleasantest room in the house; I can see everyone who passes, so I use it for a dining-room and sitting-room both. I thought of telling you that you may have the parlor all to yourself. I hardly ever use it." She left her sewing and went to a door near the open fire. "Here it is," she said, throwing it open, "and you are welcome to it. I thought perhaps you might have callers sometimes."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Gordon; I shall appreciate it immensely. Is there room for a piano, or perhaps you wouldn't care to have a piano in the house."

"There is plenty of room in that corner where that table is. I know, because my daughter Mina had one there for years, until she was married, and I shall like it better than anything in the world. I don't even care if you can't play at all,—just drumming sounds cheerful to me. I missed the piano almost as much as I did Mina when she was married."

"Your daughter is living, I hope."

"Oh, I guess she is, and has four children! She comes home once in a while, but I go oftener to see her. She isn't very rich, but she has a good husband, and he is a good provider. She feels it, coming here—you see most of the girls she used to know have money, and travel, and the life she lives makes her feel behind the times. Mary Hayward used to be a good friend to her. She treats her well enough when she sees her, but it is different now. You have been up to the Haywards', haven't you? I thought it was their horses, and it looked some like Winter in the carriage."

"Yes, it was," answered Margaret, frankly. "That reminds me, he sent you word that he is coming to call on you."

"Did he? Well, he comes every now and then, but always twice while Mina is here, and that is more than most of her friends do. I can tell you I am glad to see him, for he is always the same. Winter is a good boy. I say 'boy,' but he is as much as thirty; let me see, he is a year and three months younger than Mina,—that would make him just thirty, but he is so full of fun it makes him seem young."

"Is he always so?"

"Yes, no one ever saw him 'down in the mouth', I guess. He doesn't like style, and

makes fun of Mary right to her face, but he would do anything in the world for his family. You see, they didn't have much money until twelve or thirteen years ago. Mrs. Hayward did her own work just the same as I did. Mr. Hayward bought some stock when it was way down and it went way up. Then he invested in a lot of the mill stock here, and is now president of some of the corporations. That is why Winter feels as he does about using so much money. He calls extravagance 'throwing away poor folks' earnings.' Mary is different. She was as much as eighteen or nineteen when this luck came, but Mrs. Hayward sent her off to boarding-school, where she met girls from everywhere, lots of them very wealthy, and she likes to show off to them, I suppose."

"You have known them some time?"

"Mercy, yes, I have known Jim all my life. He is one of the best men that ever lived. He appears kind of grumpy sometimes, but there is nothing to it, and he is quite jolly. Winter is like his father, some. Mrs. Hayward I never knew until she was married; she is a good woman, I guess, but Mary gets her high notions from her. Her father was a farmer up in Henston, about eight miles north of Riseton. She was brought up to work, and was a good housekeeper too, and I don't believe she is half as

happy as she used to be when they lived in the little six-room house and she kept it neat herself. Now they have five girls to do the work, but I have heard she hangs around the kitchen a good deal more than she does the parlor."

"It is a beautiful house," remarked Margaret.

"Yes, I know it is, and it seems as though they ought to be happy, but they are in hot water now, just to know who to invite and who not to, to this reception. You know society is rather peculiar here. Fifty years ago no one had help unless they were sick, and then it was a hired girl. Now, if a family doesn't keep more than one maid or servant, they are a little off color for society, and it makes hard feelings, because they were mostly old friends, that is, the old residents. Even now there is every kind of a profession and occupation represented in society."

"What is George Gould's business?" asked Margaret, with more inquisitiveness than she had ever before known.

"He is in the grocery business. Did you hear a discussion about him being invited to the reception? He is in disgrace," she continued, laughing. "He was at one of the high doings here in town last spring, and asked a lady if she got the peas he had sent her, in time for

dinner. I thought every one would cut him after that, but George is a good fellow; it seems too bad. Winter Hayward stood up for him, said he thought it was commendable in him to show so much thought at such a time."

Chapter X

AFTER THE RECEPTION

A few days after the reception, Mr. Hayward, Senior, called to thank Margaret for the dignified and satisfactory article she had written for the papers. After thanking her he said: "I don't want you to think that I was responsible for that silly affair. The whole thing belonged to Mary. She is young—or," he corrected in his punctilious regard for truth, when he recalled her thirty-two years—"young enough to be foolish."

"But," said Margaret, "it was fine, and gave enjoyment to a great many people."

"You women see the best side of things. Mother—my wife, you know—said the same thing. She was not reared on one-thousand-dollar entertainments, but *was* brought up in the fear of the Lord, and now she is pacifying her conscience by this enjoyment theory; but I'm not so sure the people really enjoyed it. Lord Moreland was in such a hurry to get away, he had no time for the social part. The good old-fashioned amusements suit me best. Do you remember the spelling-schools, Nancy?" he

said, addressing Mrs. Gordon. "No great expense about those, except the tallow candles and mayhap an oil lamp or two. Weren't those good times, Nancy? You young folks know nothing of the solid enjoyments of fifty or sixty years ago, but we can't go to war with a flint gun in these days, I suppose."

"We were young then, Jim; I guess that was the secret."

"Perhaps, perhaps," he said; "but some way I can't help feeling that people pay too much for their whistles nowadays. Nancy," he said a trifle awkwardly as he arose, "when we get settled a bit up at the house, I hope you will come up and see us, and bring this young woman with you."

Margaret bowed her thanks, but Mrs. Gordon replied with a semi-conscientious honesty, "I don't go about much now, Jim, but perhaps I may get up before the winter is over."

"Isn't he fine?" were Margaret's first words as the door closed.

"He is all right," nodded Mrs. Gordon, gazing down the street after him. "Don't you see how much Winter is like him? But I rather think he was more of a worker, more ambitious, I mean, when he was young than Winter has ever been. He used to work for father in haying-time, and father often said it was a pity for him to try to

make a lawyer of himself, he was such a grand farmer."

"He is a lawyer?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, yes, he went to Brown University one or two years,—that was the time he worked for father summers. I don't know how he fitted for college, I am sure, as we didn't have real high schools in them days. Come to think of it, I believe he did it partly by himself; anyway, he paid his way for a year or two at college, then came back and went in Lawyer Grindel's office to study law. And I have heard he was such a worker, Grindel paid him after the first six months. Of course he hasn't practiced law for a long time; he has all he can do to look after his money and business for the corporations. He wanted Winter to be a lawyer for the corporations when he began to practice, but he wouldn't do it. He is smart and is getting a good practice, they say, and his father is satisfied with what he is doing. I don't remember why it was Winter didn't want to go to college or study law, but his father was so set on it, he gave in. I know he used to come here and talk about it sometimes. He decided it was his duty to do as his father wanted him to, and I have heard him say several times he was glad he did it. He went to Paris last year and was gone as much as six months. I saw his father once or twice during

the time, and he always said he was glad Winter was staying, for he had stuck to work pretty close for quite a spell."

One afternoon a few days later Winter called. Mrs. Gordon was preparing supper when he arrived, so Margaret answered the ring. After she had explained that Mrs. Gordon was busy at that moment, but would be in directly, Winter saved any embarrassing moments by asking, "Father was down to see you the other day, wasn't he?"

"Yes," replied Margaret, "and I think he is charming."

"Yes, Dad is 'all-wool'. Sometimes it is a trifle hard to be sure of it at the very first, as there appears to be a rough thread in his character in some lights, but it isn't really there—I can testify to that."

"So can I," asserted Mrs. Gordon, coming in at that moment, flecking imaginary bits of something from her black sleeves. "How do you do, Winter?" she inquired heartily, shaking hands with vigor.

"Oh, I am feeble, as usual, thank you, Mrs. Gordon; but I have many 'marcies' to be thankful for, as Deacon Hubbard used to say."

"I should think you do have 'marcies,'" laughed Mrs. Gordon. "I wonder if you know 'em when you see 'em."

"It's a wise man who knows his own blessings, but now I am really brimful of a bit of good luck, and I have half a mind to tell it to you two, just to prove I am appreciative enough to take off my hat to good fortune when I meet it. I know you will be all right, Mrs. Gordon, because I learned in the old days that when I told you anything it was dead, and you were the grave of it. I have never heard, though, that a newspaper reporter was the right kind of a confidant for serious secrets, but I am going to take chances."

"I advise you to be careful," warned Margaret. "It will be a great temptation if there is any glory that may reflect back on me."

"There isn't. No one outside the bosom of my family or my neighborhood would care a copper to hear anything about it."

"Do for mercy's sake tell us and not keep us waiting!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon.

"I am in a stupid fix," mused Winter. "I can tell you, Mrs. Gordon, without preliminaries, because you had the first chapters years ago, but I shall have to do a lot of explaining to Miss Armstrong."

"I will listen to the last chapter and guess at the first," said Margaret.

"No, I don't like that. I am so sensitive, I should have to explain afterward, so I will

commence as I used to like to hear stories begin:

"Years ago there was a boy—queer chap—thought he knew it all, so when his papa wanted him to go to college he said, 'No, Dad, I know a great deal more now than I shall ever need, excepting one thing,—I want to study art.' It looked easy to the boy, you see,—not much work in it; but the father, although not a stern parent, had sense. He said, 'Son, it is the wish of my heart that you enter college and later make a great and pious lawyer.' The boy, who had great respect for his father's opinion in most things, but none whatever in this matter, decided it wasn't a dead-easy thing to be a father, and perhaps he ought to humor him in his whim; so he went to college. Near that college was an art school, and there the boy spent all of his spare time and money. He got through college with a moderate record and entered the law, but still kept on wielding the brush. There was nothing harmful about it; it just served as knitting-work. I sometimes wondered if he had not inherited the need for some kind of knitting-work from his mother, who spent all of her spare time in that occupation when he was a small boy. He did not tell the *pater* what he was doing. His conscience on that point was somewhat soothed by the remembrance that his father had proposed the Tech,

and architecture, as a compromise, when he had first shied at college, but the youth had declined that solace to his aspirations.

"When he left the law school his father gave him control of a building he owned. Here he was to open his office and have charge of the rest of the place. On the top floor was a large room with a fine north light, and there he continued to dabble. He got a picture hung in a Paris exhibition, and it has received some attention,—a prize, I guess it might be called. This happened recently, and he is now much inflated."

"And thou art the man," said Margaret.

"I am that boy," he corrected.

"I declare, Winter, I am glad! You certainly did what lots of boys wouldn't have done when you went to college just to please your father, and I think you deserve it," said Mrs. Gordon.

"I am not so sure about deserts. 'The rain falls on the just and on the unjust.' To speak the truth, I feel a trifle guilty to tell father; I feel as though it will seem to him it was a bit of a theft on my past time. But I shall ask him to try to feel like the mother of a boy who thought he had stolen a glass marble and it turned out to be a diamond. 'I would have spanked him,' she said, 'if it had only been a marble, but *this* shows he has intilligence.'

"Did you never mention it to any one?" asked Margaret. She was wondering eagerly if Fairchild knew of it.

"Yes, I had one friend; he was nearer than a brother,—nearer than some brothers, anyway,—and he knew all about it. He used to go over to the art school with me now and then."

"Did he study too?" asked Mrs. Gordon. Margaret felt grateful for the question.

"No, he didn't need a knitting-work. He had inherited generations of leisure,—not careless, pernicious leisure, but just the precious kind of the soul-refining quality."

"Why, it was that Mr. Fairchild, wasn't it?" asked Mrs. Gordon, as she recognized the description. "Where is he now?"

"He is in Colorado for his health. I hear from him every week, and I think he is gaining, by what he writes."

"I always liked him," said Mrs. Gordon. "You know you often brought him here to call when he came to see you. And to tell you the truth, Winter, you seemed a lot more like brothers than some I have seen. You know, he could fool as fast as you could."

"Yes, but Phil has a solid streak in him. You don't suspect it unless you know him as well as I do. He is one of the finest fellows I ever knew."

"Has he ever married?" inquired Mrs. Gordon.

"Yes, he married," replied Winter, briefly.

"Did he marry well?"

"Why don't you ask, Mrs. Gordon, if it is well to marry?" asked Winter.

"Because I don't need to ask you that question,—I know without any information from you; but some don't marry well, all the same."

"Well, to tell the truth, I am afraid he didn't marry happily. I don't know whether you would call that 'well' or not. He married to please his father, which was, of course, well. Wasn't it, Miss Armstrong?"

Margaret had been a silent listener; she now found it difficult to respond lightly.

"Perhaps well, if it didn't prove ill," she answered.

"I am afraid it did," he replied gravely. Then apparently feeling that he had disclosed enough of his friend's affairs, he exclaimed, "I expected to create a great excitement by announcing that I had taken a prize at a Paris Exhibition, and here, in less than ten minutes after I make the fact known, Mrs. Gordon is inquiring into the matrimonial entanglements of my friends."

"Pity about you!" laughed Mrs. Gordon. "Why don't you invite us to see some of your pictures? Then we can get excited."

"You are a mind-reader!" exclaimed Winter. "That is just what I am going to do. I don't quite think I am a Michelangelo,—in fact they are rather poor daubs; but such as they are, I should like you to see them."

"We shall come, all right," said Mrs. Gordon, as she left the room to answer the bell, which rang at that moment.

"Why, Dr. Everson!" she exclaimed, as she opened the door. "Is this you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Gordon, it is I. And I am wondering if you have any time to spend on a call from the parson."

"Yes, I always have time to see you, Dr. Everson," Mrs. Gordon responded heartily. "Come right in. Winter Hayward is here."

"Hello, Winter! This is really a pleasure," said Dr. Everson, as he came into the room. "I don't see you often these days."

"That must be due to your failing eyesight," returned Winter, introducing him to Margaret.

"That was a little hard on you, Winter," remarked Dr. Everson, after he had shaken hands with Margaret, "to give you such a reputation before a stranger. I didn't notice there was any one else here, when I came in," he added in apology.

"It was a little unjust. If I am such an unimportant person that you fail to see me of a

Sunday morning, the fault isn't mine, is it, Miss Armstrong?"

"Miss Armstrong, don't excuse him," interrupted Dr. Everson, before Margaret could reply. "My eyes are still good for the larger part of my congregation."

"That is all the praise a retiring nature ever gets! Because I am so unselfish I have given up that front seat father provided for me, to the comfort of some poor creature with feeble ears, or some proud lady with a fine new bonnet, Dr. Everson is censuring me for absence."

"Really," asked Dr. Everson, "when were you at church last?"

Winter meditated. "As nearly as I can recall," he said, "it was sometime in May. I remember it was warm and I dozed a bit."

"Winter," said Dr. Everson, with mock severity, "your case needs to be taken in hand. Here you are a young man with a duty to make an example of yourself. Your father, mother and sisters attend church regularly, and you have a minister who is ready and willing to tell you all your faults. Why don't you take advantage of such associations and opportunities?"

"There is where my extreme modesty comes in. It isn't possible for me to aspire to become an example to the superior kind of people you

cater— That word is a mistake, Dr. Everson,— I mean, that you minister to. You see," he said, turning to Margaret, "Dr. Everson's people, both materially and figuratively speaking, are set with diamonds."

"I take them as they are, Winter. You can't debar a man from the church because he is rich."

"I know that. You do your duty, I am sure, for you use that camel-and-needle's-eye text often enough to keep your conscience clean."

"Miss Armstrong, do you think it is quite fair to talk to a poor old parson as Winter is talking to me?"

"I have been holding my breath in horror at his daring. I was brought up to stand a little in awe of the minister."

"That is a correct kind of bringing up. I hope you will use your influence to reform Winter."

"Winter used to seem to enjoy going to church when he was a boy," spoke up Mrs. Gordon, in his defense.

"That is right, Mrs. Gordon; stand up for me. Of course I used to enjoy it. Dr. Everson has fallen off in his discourses. Do you know, Miss Armstrong, he rarely mentions the bad place now. Mrs. Blander says she thinks 'it is a mistake,—folks need it.' "

"H'm," said Dr. Everson. "She doesn't think she needs it, does she?"

"Oh, no; but she enjoys hearing about it and thinking what a hot time some of the people she dislikes are going to have."

"We human creatures look at things differently," said Dr. Everson, with a sigh. "Perhaps a grain of the old doctrine wouldn't come amiss now and then as a stimulator, but a man grows to dislike asserting things that are contrary to his convictions. However, I am still equal to it, if it is needed. Do you go to church, Miss Armstrong, and sleep on my prosy sermons?"

"I have been with Mrs. Gordon a few times and have never been caught napping, I believe, which proves I enjoyed them."

"Miss Armstrong has one of the essentials necessary to enjoyment in going to the stone church, that is, a nice, new, becoming bonnet. Another essential is a good opinion of your soul. These assets make the possessor feel comfortable and happy."

"I am sure Dr. Everson isn't to blame for the bonnets," said Mrs. Gordon, coming as usual to the rescue of the one she thought was "getting the worst of it."

"I am not so sure of that, Mrs. Gordon," said Winter. "When Dr. Everson sees a pretty woman in a pretty hat he includes both in his appreciation."

Dr. Everson colored, but smiled good-humoredly. He had just been regarding Margaret with what seemed a little like human admiration.

"Well, Winter, I will acknowledge to you I *am* rather devoted to beauty in both art and nature. If it is a sin, I have quite a bit to answer for; but it seems to be a part of me hard to eliminate."

"I understand, all right," said Winter, "that it isn't dead easy to dispose of our pet faults. That is where I coin pity for the heavy sinner. He has a larger invoice on his hands than he can work off at one trade."

"There is only one way," remarked Mrs. Gordon, a little piously.

"Yes, there is one way. I used to think the moment Mrs. Gordon refers to was all that was needed, but I hardly feel now that one moment can wipe out a lifetime of iniquity," said Dr. Everson.

"You believe if a man has small-pox he can't wish off the scars by a kernel of corn, as I used to try to scare off my warts when I was a boy, do you?" asked Winter.

"Your similes are always good, Winter," remarked Dr. Everson, rising, with a smile. "I hope you will come to church Sunday," he continued. "Perhaps you may be able to piece

together a creed from my rambling remarks."

As he stood there, his round pleasant face wreathed in smiles, his short rotund figure erect, it seemed as though the springtime of his youth had lingered to the autumn.

"How do you like Dr. Everson, Miss Armstrong?" Winter asked after he had gone.

"I think he is fine—both fine and funny. He looks so young, you would almost feel sure he has strings, fish-hooks and marbles in his pockets."

Winter laughed. "That is what I like so much about the old fellow. He is human, and doesn't try to conceal it. Why, I turn mental handsprings every time I see him."

"You talk rather queer to him, I think, Winter," said Mrs. Gordon, a trifle seriously.

"Oh, Dr. Everson understands. He knows I like him," said Winter, "but he is a bit sensitive on some points. He admires a pretty girl tremendously, and it is said," he continued in a half-embarrassed way, "that he demonstrates his admiration now and then."

"Do you mean those stories about his kissing girls?" asked Mrs. Gordon, in a tone of reproval. "I don't believe a word of it. I was twelve or fourteen years old when he came here, and I know he never kissed me, nor ever tried to."

"It would take a good lot of courage to do that, Mrs. Gordon," said Winter.

She arose to light the gas, apparently to put an end to the subject. Her tall, angular figure with its unyielding lines stood revealed in the sudden flood of light. She was a woman to command respect and a certain kind of admiration, but that there was anything about her to appeal to the tender emotions seemed hardly conceivable. A few moments later, however, when she was saying good-by to Winter, the warmth of her heart was manifest in her cordial appeal for him to come soon and often.

Chapter XI

THE VISIT TO THE STUDIO

The autumn days passed quickly for Margaret. The city seemed bright and attractive to her, as the ending of a strike the week before her arrival had restored an air of hope and good cheer to the entire community. Her work was not unpleasant and little time during the day was left for unhappy brooding, while the piano was a comfort for the other hours.

"I never heard anything like that," remarked Mrs. Gordon, the first evening she played. "Why, I should think you could make your living in that way. I am going to ask you to play for Mr. Bourratti sometime. He is always making places in the world for musicians."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Gordon; please do not mention it to any one. I would not make my living in that way if I had the opportunity."

"Why, how strange! Don't you want to play to any one except me?"

"You are the only audience I want just now. I don't like to play and have people sit up to listen. I like every one to go on with whatever he is doing or saying."

"Well, I hear it and enjoy it, whatever I am doing," rejoined Mrs. Gordon.

So the piano aroused no comment. Winter Hayward did not notice that it was not the same one Mina had practiced on some years before.

He came one afternoon to take them to his art den. "I don't know that you are interested in this kind of thing, Miss Armstrong," he remarked as they reached the studio.

"I am interested in everything that gives one a purpose in life, but I am sure I shall enjoy this all for myself. It must be fine to have work you can put your whole heart in, and make every odd moment seem worth while."

"You have struck the note of content for the majority," Winter answered, as they passed into the working part of the studio, "but it isn't often a woman feels that way about it. They usually lack time to keep the hair waved, or curled, or whatever they do to it, and read the latest novel. What would you do, Miss Armstrong, if you were a woman of leisure?"

Margaret laughed, straightened her tall figure, and replied, "Work, work, rest, then work again."

"But no particular kind of work?" Winter asked, a touch of disappointment in his tone.

"How well I understand what you mean!" said Margaret. "You speak of work you can call your friend, your child, or a part of yourself."

Mrs. Gordon, who had been studying a river scene that she thought too natural to be artistic came forward, looking somewhat awed at Winter's question. "I rather think you would say she works, and at something in particular, if you could hear her practice on the piano. She can make music fit for heaven; still, she practices all of her spare time."

"Is that your hobby?" Winter asked.

Margaret colored. "I love it," she said softly. "It has been everything to me,—a joy, a panacea, and sometimes a most exquisite misery. Do you understand?"

"Without spectacles," he replied, smiling. "Here is a blot from some of my moments of happy misery." He removed a covering from a large canvas with "The Strike" written under it. No one spoke for some moments; then, Margaret asked, "Is it ever as bad as that?"

"Ever!" echoed Winter. "Miss Armstrong has never slummed in a mill city during a strike, has she, Mrs. Gordon?"

"It is as true as life," Mrs. Gordon replied slowly, "only perhaps you wouldn't see it all at once."

"You mean I haven't exaggerated,—only tried to cover too much ground?"

"I hardly know what I do mean, Winter. It seems as though it is all there, but I can't express it."

"That was what I aimed to do, symbolize the strike conditions."

Margaret remained silent. Dumb agony was pictured in the faces of some of the men, brutal anger and revenge in others; looks of misery and despair darkened the countenances of the women, one here and there carrying the expression of an animal at bay; while the children wore various emotions on their young faces,—pity, fear,—and the youngest, mystified apprehension.

"But deprivation and suffering from strikes cannot last long?" Margaret asked in a tone of anxiety.

"Until the strike is ended, or perhaps some of our ladies have an epidemic of benevolence. This is usually more in evidence about Easter time, but there is sometimes cold weather before Easter sets in."

"Isn't there any way to prevent strikes?" asked Margaret. "Of course I know there are unreasonable causes for them, still"—

"Yes, still," repeated Winter, "it would seem, wouldn't it, as if a man who had been fortunate enough to have been born with ordinary intelligence, and had this intelligence cultivated only sufficiently to make him a power in the world of money, ought to be large enough in soul to help avert such disasters."

"If every one could see this, it seems to me it would recall the Golden Rule."

"Golden Rules seem to be out of date, and our friends go to Europe to see paintings. But people here are kind, as a rule. You couldn't find a man about this city, in a month of Mondays who would allow a dog to suffer, if he could help it; yet these poor creatures are as dependent on his honesty and fair dealings as the most miserable dog."

"Was this just at the time of the strike, Winter, or after it?" broke in Mrs. Gordon.

"I never asked them. They seemed to be feeling a trifle downhearted, so I left them alone," replied Winter, humorously.

"If you had the power given you, Mr. Hayward, don't you see any way to improve matters?" asked Margaret.

"It would take a larger man than I am to do it, but I have visions of it. The present condition of affairs doesn't seem built on the right foundation. For instance, the last strike was brought on by a reduction in wages. If some kind of a dividend system could be established, this kind of upset might be avoided. I mean by dividend, that the employer share certain profits with the employee."

"How could that be managed?" Margaret asked.

"We will say that I own a mill and employ a large number of men, or, for that matter, any

number of people. It is understood they receive a certain weekly amount for this work, and semi-annually they get some percentage of the profits. For this purpose I should establish a bank, and encourage the dividend to remain in the bank, allowing the regular percentage for it. This would give a sense of self-respect and rectitude that no amount of charity work can accomplish, for at one stroke it makes the man a being of some importance; as, in a way, he would be connected with the bank, also a stockholder in the mill, and to the ignorant man, who would not prize these benefits, the uncut wages of Saturday night would appeal, to his content. There would be no need of a penny of reduction in wages, and if the dividend varied at different times, it would not unsettle matters, unless the employers flaunted their accumulations in too high colors. This must all seem like ancient history to you, Miss Armstrong. Of course you have heard all these socialistic views dozens of times before, with many better ideas than I have."

"No, I haven't heard much about such things. I am afraid I am very selfish."

"You mean, you haven't time for such amusements. Charity is a fad among idle women. They rob Peter to pay Paul, by pinching their various helpers down to the last cent, then give

it to some vagabond and pat themselves for having done a Christian act."

"Seems to me, Winter, you have the women dressed too well," remarked Mrs. Gordon.

"Come to think of it, I didn't answer you right a few minutes ago. The strike *is* just on, but don't you see their dresses are cotton? They didn't pay more than ten cents a yard for that," he added whimsically, "but it is a wrong impression that they are careless and slatternly just because they work in the mills. Perhaps after the strike has lasted a long time they may grow so, but their faces would be stolid then; they would not show just fresh agony, as when they are facing the destruction of peace and happiness."

"I am glad you made it very evident that their clothes are not imitations of elegance, because it intimates that they are genuine in their tendencies. My grandmother could have told they were not expensive without pinching them. I remember when I was a little girl she used to finger the wearing apparel of various members of the family, just to know what the value might be."

"Why, Miss Armstrong! Our grandmothers must have been sisters. Grandmother Hayward used to do that every time I had a new suit, and always said, 'Jim is extravagant, to buy such a cloth for a growing boy.' "

"You don't seem to have many landscapes," commented Mrs. Gordon. She had made a tour of the room and returned to the starting-point.

"No, I don't get much earth and sky in this room, and I don't go out often to sketch. I like people better, and during the strikes there are always people enough at liberty, and at any time I can usually find some one as willing to sit as to work. Mill workers are not different from others. The majority of us have an eye to the cushioned places in life."

"We are rather queer creatures, we human beings, aren't we?" said Margaret.

"Of course we are; and the funny part of it is, the larger half of us are not acquainted with ourselves. Ten to one, if we should meet all of our own characteristics in a bunch, and didn't identify them as our own personality, we should criticize them without limit."

Chapter XII

A PLEASANT EVENING AT MRS. GORDON'S

After the visit to the studio, Winter called at Mrs. Gordon's and claimed the right to hear Margaret play.

"Let me see,—you don't like applause," he remarked after listening to something that had seemed to him like a vision in sound of all things perfect and glorious. "I am glad you do not," he added, "for I have always thought it stupid to say that this or that selection was divine or intoxicating. I should run out of adjectives and be obliged to go home,—something I don't want to be driven to do."

"Just staying and enduring is the best compliment you can pay me," returned Margaret.

"Winter," began Mrs. Gordon, after ten minutes, "Miss Armstrong says she would rather people would keep right on with what they are doing or saying while she is playing, and I want to ask you a question. Do you remember the Floyds who used to live down on Brock Street? They bought that big house of Major Sheldon and sold it to Mr. Pitman, with a mortgage on it. It wasn't a very large one, but it showed their mean ways, of course."

"Yes, they were a bad lot," Winter returned with apparently more interest in the music than in the Floyds.

"I had a letter from Mina to-day, and she said that boy— What is his name?"

"Haze," answered Winter briefly, his head leaning against a sofa pillow, his eyes closed.

"What did you say?" queried Mrs. Gordon. Her hearing was a trifle faulty, and the piano had somewhat drowned Winter's voice.

"Haze," he repeated louder, "Haze Floyd."

"Oh, yes, that was it."

There were a few trembling notes and the music ceased.

"That isn't the end of that, is it?" Winter asked, sitting up. "If it is, I feel cheated, unsatisfied. The talking didn't interfere, did it?"

"Oh, no; it helped. I will play to the end some other time. I don't want to satiate you."

"You needn't bother about that. My appetite is stronger than at the start."

"I think I will not play any more to-night. I have interrupted you and Mrs. Gordon by stopping. It is my turn to listen now. Please go on."

"What were we saying, Mrs. Gordon? Oh, yes, I remember; but it is quite a jolt from such music as that to Haze Floyd. What were you going to say Mina wrote?"

"Oh, she said a man in the town there got into trouble selling liquor, and he got this Floyd to defend him. He practices in Boston, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, the man had him come down there, and Mina knew him at a glance. He is real handsome, you know, and he knew Mina. She met him on the street, and thought she would invite him there to supper some night. You know the poor child doesn't have much society, and I guess she felt a little proud to be acquainted with such a fine-looking man, but Henry had heard some things about him and didn't want her to ask him there."

"Henry was right. I would as soon entertain a boa-constrictor," said Winter.

"I remember you never liked him very well, and that is what I wanted to ask. Is there anything real bad about him?"

"If you should ask if there is anything real good about him, it would be a more simple question. As far as I know, he is a bad man, but he is talented. He was in the art school for a time and did good work. I have a feeling, though, he doesn't care a copper for art. You can't fathom his iniquity."

"Well, I am glad to know it," said Mrs. Gordon, "and I believe you, for I never before

heard you say a word against anybody. I thought perhaps you would say there was nothing real bad about him, and I thought if there wasn't, it seemed a pity for Henry to be so particular and rob Mina of the pleasure of having him there to supper."

"Tell Mina she had better not cultivate a taste for sheep's clothing; it isn't safe."

"How is your father?" asked Mrs. Gordon, with the happy faculty she possessed of turning the conversation when it had ceased to be agreeable to her.

"Father is all right, thank you. Nothing ever goes very wrong with him. He is a philosopher, you know."

"I wish I could be taught the doctrine," said Margaret.

Winter laughed. "I am afraid I should be a poor instructor, although I think I have benefited by father's teachings. This is one of his axioms: 'Don't chase happiness; make it.' "

"That would be the difficult part to learn—how to make it," sighed Margaret.

"Father seems to have the power to give a hint that will make a fellow feel as though he could begin right away, without the least material, to manufacture the commodity. You must know something of it. Has there ever been a time in your life so dark that music hasn't helped out?"

"No," replied Margaret, slowly, "but it hasn't always meant happiness."

"Oh, well, happiness is comparative, anyway. Not expecting too much is half the battle; the other half is in being dead sure there is something better and greater coming to you. It may not be worldly goods, you know, but something, something—I can't quite explain."

"I think I get a glimpse of what you mean—anticipation, hope, expectancy."

"Yes, you are right, only, you understand, this condition must be oiled every day by work, steady work, to keep it in good running order. Father often says when he sees a man getting restless and discontented with his life, 'Why doesn't he begin to improve himself, or his condition, so that he will have no time for discontent?' Here is another of his proverbs: 'It is better to *rise above things* than to *try to jump over them.*' "

"I've seen folks with misfortunes piled up so high they couldn't jump over them, and couldn't rise above them unless they had gone up in a balloon," said Mrs. Gordon, a trifle resentfully.

"Yes, I know it does seem so sometimes, Mrs. Gordon; but there is where Dad would offer another suggestion: 'Don't try to jump above your height'—same sentiment as 'Cut

your cloth according to your pattern.' I have sometimes been afraid the dear old boy was getting too much cloth for his pattern, but he is rising out of the slums of ennui, where money so often puts a man, splendidly. He is in the new hospital now, heart and soul. You see, he didn't have time when he was young to cultivate hobbies, and is obliged to look about for interests, but I think he will always find them."

"It seems sad for people to have no object or interest in life. I can't imagine how they exist," said Margaret.

"They have to kill time—the worst kind of murder, to my way of thinking. It is better to embark in an enterprise that will be absorbing but never quite arrive, like yours and mine, for instance."

Margaret was enjoying an unexpected peace. She had dreams of meeting Guthrie sometime, somewhere, when he would grow to care for her, but before such a meeting the divorce must have been obtained by him, leaving him entirely uninfluenced by either duty or pity. She was occasionally disturbed by Mrs. Gordon's significant allusions to Winter Hayward. She remarked one day with a smile, "Winter seems very attentive to me this winter."

"Does he?" asked Margaret, with an unconcerned air, but the few words had been a stab to her conscientious mind. She felt she must avoid him, and yet there was no reason for it. He had only been kind and social. Would he not misunderstand, and think she was indulging in some girlish caprice? She shrank from being regarded in that light, so remained unchanged.

One afternoon while Mrs. Gordon was away he called. There was something in his manner that made Margaret regret she was not also away.

"I want to ask you, Miss Armstrong," he began in a half-embarrassed way, "to give me some advice. I ought to prepare you to be shocked, not at my audacity, but my ignorance. How long does a man need to be acquainted with a woman to feel sure he is in love with her?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Margaret, stumbling over her words. "I seem to have forgotten any affairs of the heart I may have had when I was a man." She was trying to treat the matter lightly.

"Perhaps a woman's opinion might count. Can't you advise me?"

"Oh, I can't on such a subject," she said hastily; "it would be too serious a matter, if the advice should result badly."

"Perhaps you may understand. I am not

generalizing on this subject. I have personal reasons I am going to lay before you. I have known you since early in October; now it is the middle of March. I have an idea that I am very much in love with you. I will describe the symptoms; then you must tell me if it is the real article. I have a higher opinion of all women than I have ever had in my life before, and whatever way I may start to go, I find I want to come here. Do these indications count?" There was an earnestness in his tone that his light words belied.

Margaret was deadly pale. "I am sure they do not," she replied. "I am so sorry, for I feel responsible for such unreal imaginings."

"Naturally," he returned, smiling, but the look of hope had gone from his face.

"I am going to tell you why I feel the blame for allowing you any reason to analyze your feelings. I have a husband. I ought not to have called myself Miss Armstrong, but"—

"Are you divorced?" he interrupted, a touch of impatience in his tone.

Margaret winced. "I do not know that I am."

"Do you wish to be?"

"No. Oh, I don't know!"

"Then in Heaven's name"—he began, but stopped. "Pardon me," he said; "I forget myself."

"If by pardoning you I could condone the crime I have been guilty of, in allowing you to think I am free, I should be glad for you to be rude to me to help efface the misery of my mistake. I can't explain why I did so," she concluded helplessly, and miserably.

"Don't try to explain. It is all right. In fact, it is more than right," he added cheerfully, "for knowing you, and feeling a peculiar—I will call it peculiar interest in you, has given me an entirely new estimate of women, and I am inclined to decide, without your advice on the subject, that the state of my mind has been due, perhaps, to a readjustment of my sentiment toward all women, rather than the great sentiment itself. I want your friendship, and if you can make any earthly use of me as a friend, I am at your service. We will both forget this episode. Will you take my hand on the pledge that there shall be no apparent break in our friendliness?" He extended his hand and Margaret took it, with tears in her eyes.

"I can never forget your kindness to me, and I am grateful that you are willing that the friendship shall continue."

"The loss would be mine if it were dissolved. Do you know, I have always thought there were only two kinds of women: one kind, charming

dolls, nothing more; the other kind, not charming (unless it was a fellow's duty to consider them so, by reason of kin), but just fretting caretakers, making mountains out of molehills. Both kinds, as I looked at it, had more vanity and conceit than common sense. But these delusions have all passed away, and I see a new heaven and a new earth. You have transformed me, and I don't want you to broil your conscience over any coals of pity for me. I am the better and the happier for knowing you, even though the last half-hour has been like a cold plunge. It has given me quite a shock, but the glow of your friendship will bring me out all right. By the way, Webster told me he wanted you to go to Newport one day the first of the month. Have you heard anything about it?"

"Yes, he wants an article on the appearance of things down there."

"Ever been there?" asked Winter.

"No."

"Then you must let me go down with you. I can show you the points of interest, and tell you what is what."

"I shall be very glad if you can. How early in the day will it be best to start?"

"We can take the 9.15 train down and come up in the 4.30. That will get you here at Mrs. Gordon's supper hour. Here is Mrs. Gordon coming."

"You here, Winter?" she queried as she came in. "Of course you missed me," she added, with a meaning smile.

"Why, yes, I came to see you about something, and of course was disappointed to find you out," he answered shamelessly.

"What was it?" she asked quickly, her curiosity at once aroused.

"Will you sit for me to paint you? Miss Armstrong will act as chaperon, so you can come to the studio."

"Do you really mean it?"

"Certainly."

"What will you do with the portrait when it is finished?"

"You may have it eventually, but you won't mind if I exhibit it first, will you?"

"I don't know as I should."

"Will you come, then?"

"Perhaps. Of course you know I wouldn't do it on my own account, but Mina and the children might like it."

"To be sure they will. It may hang in the White House yet as grandmother's or great-grandmother's portrait."

"I'll come," she answered, as she excused herself to look after the preparations for supper.

As she passed out, Winter smiled. "Perhaps you doubt my intention to propose that to Mrs. Gordon before she came in."

"I fancied it was rather an impromptu thought," returned Margaret.

"Her remark, so pointed in its tone, was like an inspiration to me. The thing has floated in my mind from time to time. She will make a fine study, but I confess to you the exigency of the situation brought it to the surface."

Chapter XIII

HAZEN FLOYD'S OFFICE

Hazen Floyd's office was a place of some luxury. The little girl seated at the typewriter had not wholly recovered from her awe of its grandeur, although she had had two months to become accustomed to it. She was by far the most attractive feature of the place, as her young and innocent face possessed much beauty, and a gleam of happiness that enhances the charm of either beauty or youth. She felt that her guardian angel had been very clever, to direct her life into such pleasant channels. The day the agency had sent for her to take the place, her mother had come in to interview Mr. Floyd, and had decided he was the kind of man with whom she could trust her unsophisticated daughter of seventeen without misgivings, and the mother's opinion had been more than absorbed by the daughter. He seemed to her almost divine in his gentleness and goodness. The little attentions he bestowed on her seemed but natural gifts from such a godlike man.

Already his step outside the door brought a flood of color to her face, but there was no thought

of love in her mind, as he seemed a being far above her, one to be adored. And when in his fatherly manner he placed a hand on her arm, she felt like kneeling to him as she would to a statue of Christ. During the last few days he had been kinder than usual, and as she gazed down on another building of offices, she pitied every girl there, as she compared their daily lives to her own.

There was a tinge of spring in the air, but it brought no discontent to her, as she would have chosen this shut-in office to the bluest sky and the most beautiful flowers, for now, when she heard Floyd's voice in the corridor, were there not spring and summer and sunshine in her heart?

"Hello, little girl," he remarked as he came in. "Is everything all right?" The words were simple, but the voice was the mellow and sympathetic one always used when speaking to the gentler sex.

"All right, sir," she replied, then blushed to think how crude and commonplace her answer had been.

"And you have these bills all copied!" He now spoke in a tone of surprise and commendation and sat down beside her to look at the papers. "I am thinking," he murmured, rather sadly, "what I shall do if you ever run off and leave me."

"Oh, I am not going to," she volunteered hastily, as though trying to assuage his grief at once.

"It is good of you to say that, for you must know, dear girl, that I have learned to care very much for you, to love you," he whispered fervently, placing a palm over Esther's little hand as it lay on the table.

At that moment the outer door opened, and a man came in. "I want you to come down to the City Prison with me, Floyd," he said hurriedly. "Can't you come right along with me, now?"

As the men were leaving the room, Floyd managed to give Esther a look. In it were a benediction, a caress and a farewell. As soon as the door closed, she fell on her knees and offered a prayer of gratitude for her happiness. She had been reared in a little Vermont town, and had been taught to look up to and reverence her superiors. The worldly wisdom and self-assertion of the city girl of her class and occupation were a serious and unfortunate lack in one of her temperament. She had been living in fairyland since the previous October, when her mother had brought her and three younger children to one of the suburbs of Boston, where she hoped to fit them to make a way for themselves in the world. Esther had studied stenog-

raphy through the winter, and had been recommended for diligence and attention to her work. She remained kneeling until the wonderment of it all became greater than her gratitude, and raising herself she went to the mirror. The glass did not explain the situation, although she saw a remarkably pretty face, but she was so used to it that she could see nothing very different from what she saw every day when she scrutinized it to assure herself it was clean. But the soul-awakening event had perhaps aroused a bit of latent appreciation in her rather artistic nature, so that she got a glimpse of the truth. She blushed in recognition of her vanity and tried to purge her mind of its folly by saying to herself, "I am not a quarter, no, not a tenth as pretty as hundreds of girls I see every day." So the question she asked herself remained unanswered by any tangible reasoning, and the only way she could regard the miracle that had come to her was that it was a gift from God.

When the telephone rang at four she answered it mechanically, like a sleep-walker, but when she heard Floyd's voice she trembled.

After she had managed to return the "Hello," Floyd's voice asked softly, "Is this Esther?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, almost in a whisper.

"I can't get back on time to-night, so you

may go at five. Don't trouble to lock the outer office. I may come in later,—and Esther," he continued in that same gentle voice, "don't tell your mother. You understand what I mean, don't you? I will explain to-morrow."

"Yes, sir, I understand," she replied, blushing.

"And I can trust you to say nothing to-night?"

"No, sir, I won't tell," she answered in her childish language.

"That's a dear Esther. Good-by until to-morrow, little girl." The last words were hardly audible, but Esther's keen ear drank in every shade of sound in the beautiful music they made.

It was a disappointment not to tell mother, for there had never been a moment of her life that her mother had not been familiar with, but she consoled herself with the thought that it would be only until the next day and then mother would be happy for her. She was almost afraid to meet Floyd the next morning, her happiness was so exquisite, she felt like shielding it; but when he bent and his handsome eyes looked into hers, she thought she could never again be happy away from the radiance of his glance.

"Well, little girl," he asked after he had given her a lingering kiss, "are we happy?"

Esther's heart had seemed to stop beating for some seconds, but she managed to say, "Yes, sir."

"Very, very happy?" he continued, brushing a curl from her forehead.

"Yes, sir," she again answered.

"Esther dear," he began, seating himself beside her, "if I should ask you to marry me very soon, do you think you love me enough to be my wife?"

"I couldn't love you any more than I do now." She had tried to make a long reply, remembering her other, "yes, sirs."

"I want to ask you if you would mind not being married in church? Your mother told me you are a Christian, that is, belong to the church."

"I try to be," she said seriously, answering the first question.

"And will that make any difference about being married out of the church?"

"I don't know," she answered uncertainly. Her first impulse had been to say, "I will ask mother," but mother hadn't been mentioned and she did not want to be the first to allude to her.

"Well, darling, I have something here, the first step toward our marriage,—or it is the same as a marriage certificate, if we don't care for a church wedding. Now, girlie, I am going to give this to you to show we are truly engaged," and he sealed what seemed to Esther as a sacred

compact with a kiss. "You may take this home with you, but don't tell your mother to-night. We will wait until the wedding day is set before we mention it."

The next afternoon Floyd said to Esther: "I want to celebrate the event of our engagement by taking you to supper to-night. I know a nice hotel where we can have a little corner all to ourselves."

"But mother is expecting me home."

"Telephone out that you can't leave the office until late."

"We haven't a telephone, and it isn't true that I am going to stay in the office."

"To be sure," mused Floyd. "I didn't think what I was saying. Write a note and I will send a messenger boy out with it. Just say Mr. Floyd wants you to stay late. Some other time we can explain."

This did not seem untrue, so Esther wrote the note. But the explanation to mother was not made. Floyd gave plausible excuses that Esther accepted with faith when his arms were about her, but when he was away, gleams of doubt as to the reason would flit through her truthful mind. When they came they almost consumed her with agony, and she suffered from the misery of deceit with an intensity that a girl who had not been mothered from the cradle could not

have felt, for she had to tell her mother that her work kept her late, and poor Mrs. Underwood feared Esther was slow and not able to accomplish the required amount of work during the day.

Floyd continued kind and devoted. He told Esther one day he thought it was better to bring in the paper he had given her and put it in the safe. "What did you do with it, Esther?" he asked. "You know you promised me you would lock it up."

"I did. I put it in a little writing-box that used to be mother's. She gave it to me, and I have the key."

"Have you it with you?" he asked rather anxiously.

"Yes," and she took it from her pocket.

"Don't keep it there," he said hastily. "You may lose it. Was there anything else in the box?"

"Yes, a five dollar gold-piece father gave me just before he died, and some gold beads that were his mother's."

"I mean anything your mother would want?"

"Oh, no; those were the only things there, and mother wouldn't want them."

Floyd looked relieved, kissed her, and said: "Be sure to bring the paper in to-morrow and I will put it in the safe with the other; then we shall both know where they are. You may read

to-day, or do anything you like. I haven't anything in particular for you to do, as I am going to Rhode Island and shall not be back before night."

"Are you going to be gone all day?" The question was almost a wail.

"Why, yes, my dear; I have a client down there. You can't expect me to stay here all of the time."

"No, no, I don't," replied Esther, trying to keep back the tears; "but I am so lonely." The words lost her her self-control, and she burst into hysterical weeping.

"Why, Esther, what is the matter?" Floyd asked kindly enough, but there was a look of impatience on his handsome face.

"Why, I keep thinking all the time, when I am here alone, and I miss you so."

The last words touched him. He took her in his arms and tried to comfort her. "Tell Floyd all about it," he whispered, holding his face down to hers.

"Why, if I could only tell mother about the marriage."

"Hush, you know I have explained all that to you. Don't you trust me?"

"Oh, yes," she sobbed; "but I feel so badly not to tell mother. It seemed awful to be married without her, but not to tell her is dreadful."

"Don't you think this is hard on me? I have told you why I cannot announce the marriage now without great disadvantage, and if you care for me you will be sensible."

"I will," she gulped, "I will."

"That is a good girl, and you mustn't mention it to anyone until I tell you it is all right; and you won't forget to bring in the paper, will you?"

"No, I won't forget," she murmured, trying to dry her eyes to receive his parting kiss. He did not return the next day. Esther received a telegram saying that he was detained.

Chapter XIV

A DAY AT NEWPORT

The day that was chosen for the trip to Newport was beautiful in the extreme, and Newport on a fine day does not seem unlike what one might wish heaven to be. The clear sunlight and the crisp air gave Margaret a feeling of exhilaration that spring often brought to her. Winter's manner was puzzling. It did not indicate quite that he was suffering from disappointed hopes, but he seemed preoccupied, as though his thoughts were on matters remote from his daily life. When they reached Newport they took a carriage driving first to Eastern Beach. The waves were riding high. Clouds of mist holding all the tints of the rainbow were floating after them.

"How perfectly beautiful!" said Margaret. "It looks like a race, each one trying to outdo the other."

"Yes, the surf is usually fine here. The waves catch the sun just right at this time of day to give them those prismatic colors, and they seem to feel no depressing effects from association with Bohemia."

"Is this Bohemia?"

"Here is where the world bathes, *the world outside of the four hundred*." The hours of that day were a succession of delight to Margaret. As they were driving slowly down the avenue in the afternoon, they met an automobile. Other than the chauffeur, the only occupant was a lady swathed in crape. Winter raised his hat as the lady bowed rather austerely. After a few minutes Winter asked, "Do you remember hearing me speak to Mrs. Gordon of a friend who was very near to me?"

"Yes," replied Margaret, with a premonition of what was coming.

"That lady is his widow."

"He is dead?" interrogated Margaret.

"Yes, he died nearly three weeks ago. I was very much shocked, as I did not know his illness was considered hopeless."

"Had you been hearing from him?"

"Yes, his last letter came only two days before the telegram. I understand why he did not let me know the truth about his condition. I had written him that father needed me here during the winter and spring, but I should get out to see him sometime this summer. If I had known how sick he was, I should have taken the time before spring."

Margaret began to understand the change she had noticed in Winter. "Was the funeral in Colorado?" she asked.

A ghost of a smile flitted over Winter's face. "Phil left a wish in regard to his burial, so like him that, hearing it since his death, it seems like a message from his humorous soul. In the letter of directions left with his lawyer, to be opened at his death, he said that he wished to be buried in Colorado, as he should be no more lonely there dead than alive."

"Was his wife with him when he died?"

Winter shook his head gravely. "No, she was not."

"Of course he was with friends?"

Winter brightened. "There is where I get my greatest comfort. He came across some one out there who was everything to him, congenial, unselfish and inspiring. Philip always spoke of him as King, but that isn't his name. I can't quite remember it,—it sounds rather Scotchy,—but it doesn't matter what it is. Phil gave him that name because he thought he was a king among men."

"Was he with him through his sickness?" Margaret asked, trying not to betray her intense interest.

"Yes, he was with him for months. Philip left letters to be sent to me, in which he told me about the entire year, and do you know, he said he had not been unhappy during the whole time."

"Did Mr.—the man named King—stay with him?"

"No, Phil stayed with King. It was this way. He went out there a little more than a year ago and lived at a sanatorium. I did not know it, but the doctors in Denver told him at the very first there was no hope. After he had been there a few months he fell in with a very delightful couple. Last fall, the wife was called away. They had been living in tents on account of King's health, and after the wife went, King took Philip to the tents. They had a man come up from Denver to look after them, so they were made very comfortable."

"Did King get well?"

"Yes, very well. I have had two or three letters from him. He promised Phil he would come to see me. He is with his family in New Hampshire now, but will come out here sometime this summer."

"Did Mrs. Fairchild go to Colorado at the last?"

"Yes, you may be sure she did the proper thing then. Her excuse for not going while he was living was that she could not stand the privations of life out there, but Phil was just as well off without her. Do you remember what Mrs. Gordon asked me about his marriage?"

"Yes."

"Here we are at the station," he remarked as the carriage stopped. "We shall have five or six minutes before our train leaves. While we wait I am going to tell you about his marriage, if you feel any interest in the matter. Perhaps you won't care to hear anything about it, as he is a stranger to you; but for some reason I like to talk about him."

"Do tell me all about it. I shall like very much to hear it."

"Well, to begin, the first year we were in college, Phil fell in love with a dear little girl whose mother was taking some of the boys to board. She was charming and admirably suited to him. The affair went on. She grew in grace and Phil in devotion. The last year of the law he kept thinking of ways to make the situation known to his father, who was a hard-headed old chap; but Phil had never tried to break down the command to 'honor thy father.' His mother was a dear woman, but was so in the shadow of her husband, people regarded her as more or less of a nonentity. Phil worshipped her, and had confided his secret to her in the early stage of it. Just before we left the law, Phil was taken sick with measles, and was in bad shape for a time. Old Fairchild came out, caught on to the whole affair, and raised a tornado. Alice, the little girl, told Phil they

must break the engagement. Phil begged her to wait, as he could not combat the old man then, but Alice died in less than a year, of consumption. Three years ago Phil married this woman to please his father, who was on his last lease of life. It was the most wicked thing old Fairchild ever did, for if there was ever a case where pearls were cast before swine, this was it. She has no more heart than that ice-tank over there."

The train steamed up just as the recital seemed finished.

"How quickly the time has gone!" said Winter, after they were seated in the car for Riseton.

"Hasn't it! I am so much obliged to you for making it such a splendid day. If I had been alone, it would have seemed dubious."

"I can't quite explain what it has done for me," returned Winter. "I have been mortally blue since I knew about Phil, but talking to you has in some way made it better. You know a conceited man is often affected by his own gabble. Telling you of Phil's life makes it almost seem as though he is in luck to be out of it, and seeing that bunch of crape and craftiness helps to lessen my regrets."

"Possibly the crape helps to lessen hers. It is extremely becoming."

"Yes, I fancy she will sorrow long and blissfully."

The train was moving slowly over a main thoroughfare, when Winter, looking ahead, exclaimed. Margaret turned her eyes in the direction of his gaze just in time to look Haze Floyd squarely in the face. His auto was waiting for the train to pass. He raised his hat hastily.

"That was Haze Floyd," remarked Winter. "Do you know him?"

"I knew him somewhat a year or two ago."

"I hope he isn't a close friend of yours. If he is, I may have injured your feelings by some of my remarks."

"He isn't a friend,—that is, I don't regard him so now,—so you have not offended me."

"Perhaps you do not agree with my opinion of him, though."

"I never knew anything about his morals, and I think I did not know him very well. How green the grass is beginning to look!"

Winter realized the subject of Haze Floyd was in some way distasteful to Margaret. When they reached home, Winter went in and asked Mrs. Gordon if she could come the next day for the first sitting.

"Yes, I can come to-morrow," she replied, "but I can't come again for quite a spell. I am going to Mina's Wednesday to stay over Sunday."

"That will be all right. You will not change very much in that time, unless the anxiety of leaving Miss Armstrong here alone turns your hair gray."

"She isn't going to stay alone; Carrie Mason is coming over to keep house and stay nights."

"Then you haven't a thing to worry you. You will come home looking so fresh and rested, I shall have to paint out every intimation of a wrinkle I make to-morrow."

"I don't want you to put in any wrinkles, then you won't have any to paint out."

"Come, now, I don't believe you want a baby face. You would look like your own grandchild. Why, I am cultivating a few wrinkles myself, just to show people I have thought once or twice in my life. You know they are the greatest marks of character in the world."

"I guess you won't have as much trouble getting wrinkles as you would religion."

Winter laughed "They would be more sure to stick," he replied.

"How fine you look, Mrs. Gordon!" said Winter, on the afternoon of the first sitting. "Do you expect me to make all that shiny beadwork stuff look as gay as it does on your dress?"

"Yes, certainly. If there is any danger I am

going to hang in the White House, I don't want to look like a town pauper."

"Don't you fear. I am going to make this picture imposing, all right. If you will count the beads, Miss Armstrong, I will get every pinhead one of them in."

"Plus heads, minus wrinkles is it?" asked Margaret.

"It is plus everything that will make a handsome portrait."

There was a rap at the door. Winter opened it and found his office boy. "Come in, Sam. What is wanted?" he asked genially.

"There is a man down in your office. He says he has got to see you."

"And he is sure he is going to, is he? What did you tell him?"

"I told him you wasn't going to see anybody this afternoon, but he hung on so, I thought perhaps I had better come up and tell you."

"What is his name?"

"He wouldn't tell me."

"Well, you go down, Sam, and ask him to please give you his name. I am a trifle suspicious he is a book agent, as he doesn't want to mention his initials."

The boy was back in a few moments. "He says he don't want to give his name, but he is no peddler."

"I suppose," said Winter. "I ought not to disregard such a mysterious and imperative summons, but I shall be back in a moment, if you will excuse me."

"It seems nice to see Winter act like himself again. He has seemed pretty down in his spirits for a week or two," remarked Mrs. Gordon.

They waited composedly for fifteen minutes, then Mrs. Gordon volunteered the opinion that it must have been something important. Another fifteen minutes, and she wondered what was keeping him. Before the hour had passed she was very nervous and could think of nothing but Winter's prolonged absence, and that she was warm and uncomfortable in her best gown.

When he came, it was as though he had been gone years, he seemed so changed.

"I don't know about the light, now," he remarked, with no apology for keeping them waiting so long.

When Mrs. Gordon complained that she felt sorry she had waited the hour, and wasted the whole afternoon, he fell at work without a word. Margaret's sensitive nature felt an accusing meaning in the way he had regarded her when he entered the room. She thought of Guthrie. Was it possible he could have talked of his past to the extent of betraying her identity to Hayward? She looked intently at a page of

the book she had been reading without knowing a word there. Occasionally Winter asked Mrs. Gordon to turn this way or that. Aside from these requests the silence was unbroken. Margaret dreaded the moment when he should stop work, but when he did, it was soon over. He seemed anxious for them to go at once, and when Mrs. Gordon lingered to look at the canvas, and professed herself as well pleased with the work of the afternoon, he pushed the easel back in the corner, where the darkness had commenced to fall, and said rather tersely.

"There is no satisfaction in looking at it to-day."

"When do you want me to come again, Winter?" inquired Mrs. Gordon.

"We can arrange that later," he replied indifferently. Then as though recalling something he asked with a show of interest, "You say you are to be away to-morrow."

"Yes, I shan't be at home before Sunday night, and maybe not before Monday."

"Well, then, we will say a week from to-day. That will be Tuesday."

"Something stirred Winter all up this afternoon," said Mrs. Gordon, as she and Margaret were walking toward home. "Didn't you notice it?"

"I hardly know," Margaret replied, absent-mindedly.

"You see, I have known him so long, I can read him pretty well," asserted Mrs. Gordon. She seemed to feel a certain pride in her keenness and their intimacy.

Indignation burned in Margaret's mind. She was stung by what seemed to her like immature and unjust censure. She was not over her resentment the next afternoon, when Winter Hayward called.

"I came because I knew Mrs. Gordon was to be away," he began, "and I wanted to ask you a question. If I fully believed what was told me yesterday, I should have no right to ask it, but I find I don't believe it. Are you Haze Floyd's wife?"

"Haze Floyd's wife!" she ejaculated. "What do you mean? No, I am not Haze Floyd's wife."

"Good!" exclaimed Winter, in a tone of relief. "I didn't half believe it yesterday. I haven't believed it at all, to-day, I think."

"Why do you ask me such a question, Mr. Hayward?"

"The man who wanted to see me yesterday was Haze Floyd. He saw us on the train, you know, and came to ask where you are."

"You didn't tell him?" she asked nervously.

"No, I didn't give him an intimation that you were in town, but he said he had a right to know, as you are his wife."

"It is a wicked lie," gasped Margaret.

"I believe you, but don't you know you told me you were married, and then I discovered you knew Haze Floyd, and naturally I was a little stunned at first. It seemed to knock out the foundation of my new faith in women."

"Don't believe it, Mr. Hayward, please don't. Why does he say such things?"

"Because he is a wretch."

"He is more than a wretch, to make such a statement. He is an imbecile. Does he think saying that will make me, or anyone who knows me, accept it as true?"

"He pretended to have proof."

"Proof!"

"Yes. He showed me a marriage certificate."

"A marriage certificate with my name in it?"

"Yes."

"How could he have got it?" Margaret asked in surprised horror.

"Someone must have impersonated you."

"Do you believe that? Isn't it a forgery?"

"I thought that might be the case at first, but I have ascertained this morning that it isn't."

"How did you learn that it isn't?"

"I looked up the records."

"Where?"

"In Providence."

"My God!" cried Margaret. "What have I done to deserve this?"

"Don't take it so hard, and we will get to the bottom of it. I am just glad to know it isn't true."

"I thank you for believing me, after all the evidence against my word; but what can we do—I do, I mean?"

"Have patience, to start with. Then we must get all of the facts together. Did Haze ever propose to you?"

"Yes," she murmured gravely.

"And you gave him no encouragement?"

"No, I think not."

"You mean you refused to marry him?"

"Yes, I refused, and I left Boston to make my refusal final."

"I hope you will be perfectly frank with me, Miss Armstrong. It will help to clear things."

"I will." Margaret replied slowly, pressing her hand to her brow. "I will tell you of my entire acquaintance with Hazen Floyd. I was introduced to him at an office of the paper I was working on. Later he came to call on a distant relative of his, at the house where I was living. The relative was an agreeable old lady,

and when she discovered Mr. Floyd had met me, she frequently invited me to the sitting-room during his calls. That was how I came to know him."

"But you say you left Boston to escape him. Did he persist in his attentions after you refused him?"

"Yes."

"And that was why you left the city?"

"Mr. Hayward," Margaret began haltingly, "I don't know if I can make you understand why I left Boston. I told Mr. Floyd I could not marry him, but he felt so sure I would, I was afraid I might. There seemed to be two of me. You understand, I knew no harm of him, but I instinctively felt he was not the man to help me live the best that is in me, and I could never care for him as I should wish to care for the man I was to marry. On the other hand, his persistence and strong personality had an influence over me, and I was afraid I might lose sight of my higher ideals of life. I changed my boarding-place once or twice, but he always discovered me. The only thing to do was to go away."

"You rather feared him?"

"Yes, in a way I did."

"What time did you leave Boston?"

"I think it was the last day of March."

"Have you any remembrance where you were the thirtieth of the month?"

"No, I don't remember the day in any way," she replied thoughtfully.

"Miss Armstrong, I don't want you to misunderstand me, and think me suspicious, but I want to ask you another question."

"Ask me anything. I am only too glad to help in any way I can."

"Why did you not say that you knew Haze Floyd when Mrs. Gordon and I were speaking of him?"

"Because I had heard after leaving Boston that he was a bad man, and I felt his attentions to me were almost a disgrace, and I could not bear to say I had ever known him."

"Then you have not tried to conceal your marriage from him?"

"Conceal my marriage from Hazen Floyd!" she exclaimed. "No, I have not. Have you been thinking that I have not used my lawful name to deceive him?"

"I did not know, but I do now."

"I can't explain about it to you," she said, "but I will say my marriage seemed of value to me as a protection from him, and I should have been glad for him to have known it if"— She hesitated.

"Never mind. I understand you haven't a remnant of regard for him now."

"I have almost loathed him, since I knew of his life."

A silence fell between them. Margaret was recalling the conversation between Guthrie and Fairchild, when she had received her first knowledge that Floyd was not even up to her rather prejudiced estimate of him. Suddenly something flashed through her mind and without a moment's thought, she asked,

"Mr. Hayward, did Mr. Floyd ever tell you that some woman had scorned him, and he would get even with her?"

"By George! Yes, I remember, and you must have been that woman. I also remember he said he had always treated her with respect, but when he had asked her to marry him, she had refused to do so,—but how do you happen to know of that?"

"I can't say," faltered Margaret.

"Did I mention that to Mrs. Gordon? I had forgotten I did. But this must be the revenge he talked of, and he is trying to make it cast iron."

"Can he assume any control over me or my affairs?" asked Margaret, in an apprehension of danger. "Do you remember the account in the paper not long ago of a man who attempted to get his wife in an insane asylum when she left him because of his intemperance?"

"Oh, Haze won't try any dodge of that kind."

"But you told Mrs. Gordon the other day that one couldn't fathom his iniquity."

"But he doesn't know where you are."

"He will soon find out, if I stay in this little town."

"Don't say that. I can help you more if you stay here."

"Yes, I know I need help, but I lack courage for any kind of a conflict." Instinctively her thoughts turned to Guthrie. In this extremity she felt he would be a tower of strength, but the thought of him brought an infliction of pain. If Floyd's avowal could not be disproved, what a shocking crime the simple little ceremony at Roden might be regarded. She would have been consoled if she could have known how gladly Guthrie would enlist in any cause to protect her from pain and suffering. He was trying to pass the balmy spring days in the old home, and in the sacred company of his mother, with a semblance of his old peace and content, but it proved a sad failure. He was restless and absent-minded. He felt he must search the world for Margaret, and yet what would it avail? He had explained the marriage to his mother as Margaret had requested, and afterward added his own version of the affair, putting Margaret in the light of an angel. Tears of love for the unknown

daughter filled the motherly eyes, and not only tears of love, but of pity, for she was sure in the innermost region of her heart that Margaret must care, must be broken-hearted over Mac's apparent indifference, for he had not divulged the great secret in his own soul that was making him chafe under the restraint of filial duty that was keeping him at Wyndal for the few weeks he had decided he must stay, and Mrs. Guthrie did not suspect he needed the pity she was lavishing on Margaret.

"Poor Margaret!" she sighed from time to time.

"Why do you say that, mother?" Guthrie had asked one day.

"Why, Mac dear," she replied, "do you suppose there is a woman living who could help caring for you?"

Guthrie had blushed like a schoolgirl, but his lack of conceit fortified him against such flattery.

"Mother," he remonstrated, "everybody doesn't look at me through your eyes. To the world I am a great awkward fellow. People may pity me now and then, as they would"—he searched his mind for a comparison—"as they would an ox, especially if it were mired," he concluded, smiling.

"Mac, Mac, you don't understand women,"

she retorted; and the suggestion her words implied caused him to begin counting the days before the expiration of the time he had set as a limit to his present stay in Wyndal.

Chapter XV

MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES

Esther looked white and anxious when she reached the office the second morning after Floyd had asked her to bring in the license. He came out from his private office when he heard her step.

"Good-morning, Esther. What is the matter, child? You look ill."

"Nothing is the matter," she replied, slipping into her chair in front of the typewriter, but she trembled visibly.

"I am glad you are all right. I hope you did not forget the paper. If you will give it to me now, I will put it in the safe before any one comes in."

"I haven't got it," Esther confessed.

"Haven't got it! Didn't you promise me you would bring it in?" He looked as though he had just discovered an unknown quantity in her.

"Yes, I promised, and I meant it, but I couldn't get it," she hastened to say.

"Couldn't get it! You had the key to the box you said it was in."

"I will tell you how it was," she began, still

trembling. "The box was in Marion's and my room, but there have been so many houses broken into, mother took everything of any value and locked them in a box in the attic."

"Can't you get the key to the box? Can't you tell your mother you want the things that are in it?"

"I don't think I can. Mother won't let me wear the beads, and she knows I wouldn't spend the money father gave me, for anything."

"I thought I could trust you," he said reproachfully.

Esther's eyes filled with tears.

"Don't begin that," he cried pettishly. "You must bring it in to-morrow, and then it will be all right. I am going to be here all day to-day and don't believe I shall need you. You may go out home, and perhaps you will be able to get hold of it, during the day. "Hello, Winter!" he exclaimed as the door opened. "You are out early."

"Perhaps it is a shade early. I came in to take a look at that marriage certificate, if you will be kind enough to let me see it." Winter replied.

"I can't stop for anything this morning, Wint. I have an engagement," he said hastily, securing his hat. "Walk along with me, and we can talk."

Esther stood like one in a dream while the men passed out. Floyd's falsehoods were beginning to bring her womanly wisdom to its inheritance of sorrow. She knew that a few moments earlier he had told her he was to stay in all day. And the marriage certificate! What did it mean? She felt as though the earth had fallen, but womanlike began to draw some remnants of comfort about her. Perhaps Floyd had forgotten an engagement and only recalled it when the stranger came in. And the certificate—Why, as a lawyer, that was his business. It belonged doubtless to the man who wanted to see it. After consoling herself, she began to look for something to do that would please Floyd. Her one thought was to find favor in his eyes.

That afternoon when he came in she felt almost happy again, for he was very tender to her, telling her he had forgotten an important engagement in the morning, and Esther was rejoiced that she had been so just in her conclusions.

"Were you lonely, dearie?" he asked.

"Not very," she returned brightly, trying to be brave.

"I have been thinking, darling, that I don't quite like the idea of having my wife here in the office. It does not seem just the thing."

"Oh, don't make me stay at home. I shall die if I don't see you every day."

"Esther," he said firmly, "you must do as I think best."

"But if you only knew how dark everything looks when I think I am not going to see you."

"I know, dear girl, but it is better this way. Stay at home with your mother for a time. Tell her I do not need you just now, but I will send you a check every Saturday, only it shall be larger than it has been."

"How long a time will it be?" she gasped, shaking like a leaf.

"I can't say just now. We will wait and see."

"But you need some one here. Will you get another girl?" she asked, a pang of jealous fear adding to her misery.

Floyd laughed. "My dear little girl, if I need any one, I shall get a big awkward boy."

"May I come to-morrow?" she begged, unable to accept her retirement without trying to postpone it.

"Yes, you may come to-morrow. You are to bring in that paper, you know." He had consented willingly, as he remembered Winter Hayward had told him he was to go to New York the next day.

But the next morning she almost regretted the privilege, for Floyd was disappointed that

she did not bring the license, and did not try to veil his displeasure. He told her she must not come in again and went away without kissing her as usual. He would have been *more* disturbed if he had known Winter Hayward had received a telegram from Malcolm Guthrie asking him if he could see him Friday evening. So the trip to New York was postponed, and Winter decided to run in to Boston and try to see the certificate, as Haze had told him to come in any time, supposing on this particular day he was on his way to New York.

When Winter reached the office, Esther had not recovered from her tears. Shaking sighs escaped her, as she answered his questions in regard to Floyd's return. She knew nothing about his intentions, and at the thought a fresh gush of tears came in spite of Winter's cheery manner. But she overcame her timidity enough to ask a question in regard to the suspicion that was torturing her.

"Was it Mr. Floyd's own marriage certificate you wished to see?" she asked.

"It is, just at present," Winter replied.

"But not all of the time?" she interrogated anxiously.

"Will you tell me why you thought it might be Mr. Floyd's?" Winter asked.

"I can't. I promised not to tell."

"Perhaps I have made the same promise," Winter returned, smiling. "Have you worked for Mr. Floyd long?"

"No, sir, not quite three months."

"Do you expect to stay here all summer?"

"No, sir," she replied, her chin quivering; "this is my last day."

"You don't like the work?"

"Yes, I do, but Mr. Floyd doesn't need me."

"I am rather glad to hear you are going to be at liberty," he said, taking out a card. "I have half a ton of stuff I want typewritten. If you don't find anything better, I shall be glad to get you to do it. You can take it home and be as long as you need in finishing it." He passed her his card. "Better not say anything to Mr. Floyd about it, and you need not mention that I have been here."

"No, sir, I won't tell," she answered obediently.

Winter did not go to see Margaret that day. He wanted first to make sure of some point in the evidence Floyd had to show. So he went to Boston again Friday morning. Floyd met him politely, and after the surprise at seeing him in Boston had been explained, seemed quite willing he should study the paper as long as he wished. Winter was disappointed, as he had hoped to find some clue to its worthlessness, but there seemed no weak point in it.

He went in the late afternoon to see Margaret. To his surprise, Mrs. Gordon answered the ring.

"You here?" he asked.

"Yes, I didn't want to leave the house alone, while there is so much breaking in going on, so I came home as soon as I got Miss Armstrong's letter."

"Miss Armstrong's letter! Did she want you to come home?"

"Why, didn't you know Miss Armstrong had gone?"

"No."

"I supposed of course you did. I got a letter from her yesterday afternoon saying she was going this afternoon. I wrote right back that I would come up on that 4.20 train from Mina's but she went on the five o'clock one, so I just missed her."

"Did she leave any—any message?"

"No, she didn't. She left a letter on the dining-table with what board she owed me and for a week in advance, so I hadn't ought to complain, and she thanked me for what I had done for her, but mercy! I hadn't done anything. She was real nice, and no trouble at all. Do you know where she has gone, and what she went for?"

"No, I haven't the slightest idea where she has gone. How is Mina?"

"She is well; and I can tell you, she is thankful to Henry for not letting her ask that Floyd there to supper."

"Why, what has happened?"

"Well, he has been flirting around with a girl there. She is a bold handsome creature, but they are a poor lot. Her father is Italian and her mother Irish. Henry says Floyd had better look out for himself as her father would as soon kill him as eat."

"Haze will get finished off some day, if he keeps on," remarked Winter.

Chapter XVI

THE PARTNERSHIP

Winter went to the hotel that Guthrie had mentioned, and they talked into the small hours of the night.

"How did you and Phil happen to strike up this friendship?" asked Winter, after two hours of conversation.

"I met him accidentally at first, and he went home with me. Then he chanced to mention some one I knew, and we found there were several with whom we had more or less acquaintance in common."

"May I ask the name of the man you spoke of first? Phil's friends were nearly all mine."

"Bert Arnold."

"Bert is one of the twenty-four-karat men."

"And Haze Floyd," Guthrie added with a smile.

"Haze Floyd! Did you know Haze? He is brass,—not solid, but tinkling brass; and he has just beaten his own record here, in his low-down actions. Why, do you know, Guthrie? He has a marriage certificate purporting to make that wretch the husband of one of the finest women I have ever met."

"Does the woman know about it?"

"Yes, and she is nearly distracted. She loathes him, and has left town to escape any possible persecution."

"Strange how much misery a man of that stamp can make."

"He has sworn to make trouble for her, at least I think it was she he meant. He told me, something like a year and a half ago, that some woman had refused to marry him, and he would get even with her."

Guthrie's eyes narrowed. He was trying to recall when he had heard of a similar incident.

"Miss Armstrong, the girl to whom he says he is married, has been afraid of him, as he had assured her she had got to marry him."

"Miss Armstrong, did you say? Is she in town?" Guthrie's voice was tense.

"No, I have no idea where she is. You see, Haze got a glimpse of her, and imagines she is here, and I don't blame her for not wanting to stay."

A strange expression had settled on Guthrie's face.

"The thing is bogus, of course," he said.

"Why, yes; but there is where I am stuck. It is on record,—I have been in to see it this morning,—and there is no catch in it so far as I can see."

"Has he got the name all right?"

"Yes, that is all right,—Margaret Abbot Armstrong. You understand how the thing was done; he hired some worthless woman to impersonate Miss Armstrong."

"Can't she prove it was impossible,—that she was in some other place at that time?"

"No, she hasn't the slightest recollection of any particular person she saw that day. She had left her position to escape Floyd."

"What can be done?" Guthrie tried to ask the question calmly.

"I don't know of anything just now, but I shall keep my eyes open. When I was in Floyd's office yesterday, there was a young girl there, his typist, and there was something in her manner that made me think she might know something about it. She inquired if it was Mr. Floyd's own marriage certificate that I had spoken to Haze about in her hearing the day before. I asked why she wanted to know, and she said she had promised not to tell."

"Do you suppose she was the one who acted the part of Miss Armstrong at the ceremony?"

"That was what I had a suspicion of at first, but if she told the truth, that could not have been, as she said she had been with Floyd less than three months, and I think she told it straight. She has a truthful little face, but

I thought she might be of some use in ferreting it out, so I gave her my card and told her I could furnish her with work if nothing better turned up. Oh, I forgot to tell you she said Floyd had dismissed her and that was her last day."

"Do you suppose he didn't want her there in case you called?"

"Yes, that came into my mind."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"No, I did not ask her about her abiding place. I had an idea I should hear from her, and thought I might stand a better show not to arouse suspicions by asking questions."

"I would like to help you in this matter, Hayward. All the old Adam in me rises up at such conduct. If there is anything I can do, no matter how hard or disagreeable, just let me know, and I shall call it a favor to be allowed to do it."

"Do you know, Guthrie, what request Phil made in the letter he left with Bert Arnold for me?"

"No."

"I haven't mentioned it before, because I wanted to be dead sure that I should want to do what he proposed. Now I am sure. I have got to open an office in New York this fall. It will be a great help to my father to have me

there, and I need a partner. Phil asked me to suggest to you that you become the man. I don't only suggest it now—I almost implore it. When you just said you would like to help get at the bottom of this affair, I thought we might work very easily together, if you decide to join me."

"But that is quite a distance from the field of action, isn't it?"

"Perhaps in one way, but not in another. We can go back and forth, and I am inclined to think that Miss Armstrong may be in New York."

"It must seem like poor taste and poorer appreciation for me to hesitate about accepting such an offer, and I don't any longer; I accept, and thank you, but thanks are poor expression of what a man feels sometimes." He extended his hand. Winter grasped it cordially.

"I am in the same fix myself in regard to thanks. I'll say as Paddy did, "The more of 'em you have inside yirself, the less you can get out." But I am mighty grateful that you are willing to cast your lot with mine."

"Isn't it rather expensive, living in New York, —that is, keeping a family?" asked Guthrie.

"Yes it is, somewhat," Winter replied. "I want to ask you a question. Have you heard yet that Phil left you an annuity of nine hundred dollars?"

"No."

"He did."

"But I don't know that I ought to accept it. Will his wife be satisfied?"

"It is fixed so that she can't complain. If she should break the will, she would only get the widow's rights; the rest would go to some distant cousins. Phil gave his wife considerable more than her lawful share, and he remembered the distant cousins somewhat. There is a clause making any one of the beneficiaries forfeit what is left him, if he tries to break the will. So you see, Guthrie, you would be stirring up quite a time if you refuse it."

Guthrie was visibly affected. "I can't understand such kindness," he said.

"Why, Phil knew that you would make a better use of it than his wife would. She has enough. He has always been doing such things. He put Bert Arnold on his feet."

"Yes, Arnold told me."

"But Phil didn't."

"No."

"That was Philip Fairchild every time. He wanted us to be associated in business, and he hoped to remove some of the obstacles that might be in your way. I don't believe we shall get settled before September, but you can look up a place for your family this summer. I

have a friend I will ask to help you get what you want, as that is his business. Don't mention it," he hastened to say, as Guthrie attempted to thank him; "I am under a ton of obligations to you, for making Phil's last days comfortable."

Chapter XVII

MRS. CONGRENE'S FAMILY

Margaret went directly to New York, one idea uppermost in her mind,—to be lost. Her first impulse to remain in seclusion was overcome by a more rational second thought. She realized to be alone with such forebodings as she was suffering from would be more disastrous to her than the possibility of being discovered by Floyd. Leaving Riseton had in a way roused her from the nightmare of apprehension she had at first felt, so she decided not to hide her identity, as she had seemed inclined, behind an assumed name. She went directly to the paper on which she felt a position would be the most desirable, and was surprised to be accepted. This good fortune was so at variance with her experience the previous October, she could scarcely believe it to be true. She was again reminded of her good luck, when the man who had engaged her, in the space of five minutes and not many more words, added kindness to business courtesy by asking her if she had friends in the city, or had found a home. When she answered in the negative he wrote a few words on a card, saying as he gave it to her,

"I think that will make things all right." The card bore the name of Mr. Fanshaw. On the back was written, "Please make room for Miss Margaret Armstrong, if possible." The address was Gramercy Park. When she reached the Park she was charmed by the quiet and seclusion. It was an hour before noon. The sun shone on the enclosed greenery, with its fascinating adornments, and occupants; various colors of bloom nodded in the morning brightness, while children were shouting and playing, reminding Margaret it was Saturday morning. When she presented her card she realized she was suffering from a fear that there would be no room for her. But when Mrs. Congrene came in with the bit of pasteboard between her fingers her fears were dispelled. She was so motherly and kind in introducing herself and welcoming Margaret, it almost seemed as though she had reached home. "I suppose you are tired. Would you like to go to your room at once?" inquired Mrs. Congrene, after the few moments of acquaintance.

Margaret acquiesced, feeling almost ready to cry for joy. The friendly intimacy with which she had been treated was very unexpected, but none the less precious. It was a comfort to be alone. Things had moved so rapidly, she needed time to adjust herself to her new circum-

stances. She had come prepared to wander about desolate and alone, looking for a place to rest in, when suddenly her dark prospects had been turned to a glow of brightness. She was looking about the cozy room, when there was a rap at the door. She opened it, to find a maid standing outside.

"The madam sint me up to see if yous wanted yous trunk sint. If yous will give me the check, she will attind to it for yous," she said.

Margaret gave her the check, wondering if the conditions of her life had been changed, and everything in her path was to be smoothed before she was obliged to tread it. She had not meditated very long, however, when the door was suddenly opened, and a girl, young, tall, and with a decided personality in her manner burst into the room.

"Oh, excuse me!" she exclaimed in confusion. "I didn't know there was any one here,—there hasn't been; and I wanted a look at the babies in the Park."

Margaret sprang up, glad of the sight of youth and a happy face.

"Don't go because I am here," she cried. "I shall not obscure the vision."

"Thank you. Now that I am here, I may as well pretend I came to call. I hope you are going to live in this house. I am Marion Barton,

your next-door neighbor. I have lived here a year and found it paradise every moment of the time, so you must feel that your lucky star is rising like a skyrocket, to bring you to such a nice place."

"I believe it already. I am Margaret Armstrong, just arrived in New York. Are there many people in this house?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Marion Barton, "I'll name them, and you will see we are quite a family. Dr. Ainslee has the room under yours. Her pills are all sugar-coated. There are two teachers in the rooms back of hers, Miss Page and Miss Hero. Then there are Miss Boynton, Miss Bacon, Miss Willard, Miss Merrill, Mrs. Cheswick, and your humble servant. You see, we are all of the milder sex, but we are not of the milk-and-water kind, I can tell you. There is almost everything but a blacksmith among us. I am sure you will enjoy it. We all go into the sitting-room after dinner, and if the weather turns the least bit of a cold shoulder, we have a blaze and a nice time. Everybody does something toward making it nice. Do you know anyone here?"

"No; Mr. Fanshaw of the —— sent me."

"Oh, yes; Miss Pettigrew was here last year from there. Well, I am sure you will be glad you came," said Marion Barton, rising. "We

are all samples, the largest samples of distinct types. I stand as the homeliest girl in the city. Please don't feel obliged to protest," she added, as Margaret essayed to speak. "I am happy—lots happier than some of the pretty girls. I wouldn't have alluded to it, only I did not want you to think there is any one here less charming than I am. I am going to call for you to go to dinner with me to-night." She was gone before Margaret could thank her.

"The ice is not only broken, it's all cracked up," said Marion Barton, as they were leaving the dinner-table. Margaret laughed. It seemed to express the situation very well, as every one had treated her most kindly.

"What is on the docket this evening?" asked Marion, after they were all in the living-room. "We must make a good showing before Miss Armstrong, because I have told her we are all wonders."

"Why don't you begin that autobiography of yours, Marion? I am sure you have promised it to us for a long time, and you should do your part toward helping to bear out your statement to Miss Armstrong."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Marion. "That would be about as cheerful as reading Isaac Watts, when you want to make a homesick person feel in ragtime spirits."

"Isn't it time you contributed something, Marion, instead of holding that long life of yours up as an excuse for shirking present responsibilities?" asked Dr. Ainslee.

"I call that downright unkind," said Marion. "Haven't I always swallowed your pills like a gentleman? And never told of the horrid bitters you gave me, that I poured into Miss Merrill's window garden?"

Dr. Ainslee laughed. "I think it is time now for you to take your own bitters. All winter it has been the same story,—sometime you will tell us all about your past. We don't ask you to do that to-night, but you must do something."

"Why, don't you see, I can't read, or sing. The only thing I can do is to make faces. None of you wants to be sketched, and if you were willing to be, you would repent of it, I should make you so ugly."

"Your threats are not going to frighten us to-night. We are willing to be sacrificed on the altar of your art, for the sake of teaching you that you have responsibilities as well as the rest of us," persisted Dr. Ainslee.

"Name you weapons," Marion sighed, with a wry face.

"I think, Marion, we will have that history of your life," said Mrs. Congrene, quietly.

"Do you want it all, ancient and modern? If you do, you will have to sit up all night."

"We can take it in chapters," said Dr. Ainslee, "one chapter to-night, one to-morrow night."

"I think not. If it is going to be in serial form, it will not be published oftener than once in ten nights. There are ten of us, besides Mrs. Congrene, and she is umpire."

"If I hold that position," remarked Mrs. Congrene, "I propose that you begin at precisely half-past eight. That gives you five minutes to collect your thoughts, and you may stop at quarter of nine."

"I do not need any time to collect my thoughts. I just lasso them as I go along."

"Let's call time, then," said Miss Merrill. "She may stop three minutes earlier."

"Ladies and gentlemen, I was born twenty-one years ago next August, in a little town called Paxton, in the northern part of the State of New York."

"Honored Paxton!" murmured Miss Merrill.

"Why don't you say 'honored New York'?" asked Marion, in a tone of pique.

"Go on, Marion," said Mrs. Congrene. "Don't get into an argument with Miss Merrill. We shall not get half of the first chapter to-night if you do."

"I am going to make a horrible confession now." She spoke in a hushed voice. "I would like to shake hands with you all. You may never wish to speak to me again."

"Proceed, my child, proceed," said Miss Bacon. "We will all promise to shake hands with you after the disclosure is made; if you don't go on, we may want to shake you."

"I was born—I mean, I was named Mary Ann, and stole Marion. To be named Mary Ann seems almost the worst misfortune that could befall a child, but to be born very ugly, very red-headed, and named Mary Ann, does stretch the limit of endurance."

"Where did you drop Mary Ann?" asked Miss Merrill.

"I haven't got to that yet. The first thing I remember was living with Uncle Ben and Aunt Sarah and being called Mary Ann. Father and mother had died when I was very small, and Uncle Ben took me because there was no other place for me to go; but they were very kind to me."

"Of course," said Mrs. Cheswick. "How could they help it,—poor little fatherless and motherless girl?"

"Don't, Mrs. Cheswick; you will make me weep for myself."

"Anything of that kind makes me feel how hard it would have been for Sammy to have been left in that way."

"It wasn't hard for me. I was very happy. When I was thirteen they sent me to a little

academy eighteen miles from Paxton. It was there I stole Marion. One of the teachers misunderstood and thought I said Marion, so it was recorded that way, and you had better believe I never tried to correct it. I held my head straighter and had more respect for myself from the moment I ceased to be Mary Ann. I finished at the academy when I was sixteen, and went back to Paxton. Dear Uncle Ben seemed to think I had reached the place in a woman's life when I must gather together ambition, ideality, or any aspirations or whims of any kind, and throw them to the winds, then settle down to the natural harness of a woman's life."

"Now here is where the romance is coming in," remarked Dr. Ainslee.

"Romance! There wasn't a bit of it. That is what I should have loved, but how could a girl as homely as I am expect to have romance? I knew that wasn't for me, but I wanted some beauty in my life, to take the place of it. The young man who was in need of a housekeeper because his mother had just died didn't know if my eyes were gray or green. He knew Aunt Sarah called me a very good housekeeper, and that was what he was looking for. Poor Uncle Ben thought he was a special dispensation of Providence."

"It is something to be appreciated as a housekeeper," said Miss Bacon.

"Perhaps. But I wanted to be adored for my beauty. I wanted to be a queen among women to the one man! Anything short of that wouldn't have been my ticket. The plan of turning into a cook, without liberty to leave the place, wasn't my idea of life."

"Uncle Ben ought not to have sent you to the academy. Perhaps you absorbed ideas there antagonistic to the natural life."

"My father specified in his will that I was to go there."

"What did Uncle Ben do when he found you obdurate?"

"He did nothing. The first summer I was back in Paxton after I left school, there were some artists from Boston boarding in town, and I discovered just what I wanted to do. There were not many artistic touches in my make-up, but the love of it was all inside. Uncle Ben used to say, 'Pretty is that pretty does.' He didn't know it just spurred me on to try to do something that had beauty in it."

"Did Uncle Ben consent for you to study art?"

"No, indeed. When I asked him for the four hundred dollars that was left of my inheritance he thought I was crazy to want to spend it. So I picked berries and sold to the artists,

and I had some old jewelry that was my great-grandmother's, and they bought that and paid me ten times what it was worth. I stopped talking about art, and Uncle Ben thought I had given it up, but I hadn't."

"How did you manage to leave Paxton?"

"Uncle Ben and Aunt Sarah had gone to the county fair, and I started while they were away. My time is up. The sequel to this thrilling story will be told in ten nights. Haven't I done well, Mother Congrene?"

"You have done finely, dear, and I am sure we shall all feel anxious to hear the last chapter."

"Come, Miss Merrill, let us borrow the key and get a view of the moon on the Park. You front-roomers don't understand that we poor creatures at the back of the house can't get a sight of the moonlight on the waving trees unless we go to the trees."

"Isn't she dear and bright!" said Dr. Ainslee, as the two left the house. "I am sometimes afraid we shall spoil her, but she is so much younger than the rest of us, we can't help being a bit adoring in our attitude toward her."

"I don't believe she is spoilable," said motherly Mrs. Congrene. "She certainly seems in no danger of being spoiled by vanity."

"I believe she is really sincere in that idea about her looks, but to me she is wonderfully

attractive. Of course, she hasn't a plump beauty, but her face is so fascinating in its changing expression," said Mrs. Cheswick.

"She has wonderful eyes, beautiful teeth and a nice mouth," voiced Miss Bacon.

"If she would only get a little more flesh on her bones," said Dr. Ainslee, "I think it might make a great difference. And she is very careless about the arrangement of her hair; it curls naturally, you know. I asked her once why she didn't allow it to wave, and she said she was afraid it wouldn't look natural, and she hated a prinked-up homely person, as it made ugliness more noticeable, so she draws it back so it can't squirm."

"How did it happen that she promised to tell us about her life? I remember there was something in particular that caused her to make the proposition, but I can't seem to remember what it was."

"Why, you know, last autumn, when we decided that each of us should do something in the evening in the way of entertainment, she said there was positively nothing she could do. One day Miss Bacon asked her why she was so choice of that brown suit she wears now and then, and she replied: 'Thereby hangs a tale. If it had not been for this brown suit, I could not have come here.' We at once told

her she must give us the story as her part of the entertainment some evening, but she has always begged off, as she said it was hinged on her whole life and she needed time to get the yarn into shape."

"How fortunate the man will be who gets her!" said Mrs. Cheswick. "He will never be lonely."

"It is a lovely night," announced Miss Merrill, coming in at that moment with Marion Barton.

"It is too fine to lose sight of," said Marion. "I am going to ask Miss Armstrong if I may go up with her when she goes; then she will invite me into her room, and I shall get another glimpse of the Park."

"Aren't they all fine?" asked Marion, when they were in Margaret's room.

"Yes, indeed, I think they are," Margaret replied.

"I like some better than others," confided Marion. "I just love Dr. Ainslee; she is perfectly splendid."

"Are they all teachers excepting Dr. Ainslee?"

"No, Miss Merrill does illustrating, the same as I. Miss Willard is a newspaper woman. Miss Bacon does interior decorating. Miss Boynton is an architect. Mrs. Cheswick is the head of a dramatic art school; she is very nice, but I don't appreciate her as much as I do the others. Miss Page and Miss Hero are teachers in a private school."

"Is it Miss or Mrs. Cheswick?" asked Margaret.

"Very Mrs., thank you. Haven't you heard her speak of her son Sammy? He is the nicest young man in New Jersey—that is where he lives. His only out is the blues. Mrs. Cheswick thinks I would do nicely for him, in spite of my hideousness, because I could keep him cheered. Imagine me hiring out as a family clown. Clothed, fed and kindly treated, all for making the gentleman smile."

Margaret laughed. "I am afraid you are too particular."

"No, I am not. I only want to be worshipped. To be the one creature on earth to live for, so that the man so adoring me would immediately go and hang himself if anything happened to the beautiful me."

Chapter XVIII

THE SECOND EVENING

Margaret had been strangely moved by her new experiences. She felt that association with these agreeable women, who like herself were making their way in the world, would be little short of paradise, if she could but blot out her past. She seemed to herself strangely like an impostor, yet knowing she had not consciously erred; but as she looked back upon her life she felt she would like to recall the past four years of it and live them over. She was constantly comparing herself to those about her. It seemed to her the others were marvels of common sense, judgment and cheerfulness, as they had had no temptation to revolt from the every-day paths of life. Marion was the only one to seem like a kindred spirit in what she critically regarded in herself as vagaries, and even she had not allowed any foolish inclinations to control her. She had a feeling that Marion's mental calibre was of a texture to make difficult the travelling of a monotonous road of existence as placidly as the others. She could not anticipate a future for herself, as every way seemed hedged by the

false and real ties woven about her. She was, however, grateful for the present surroundings, that kept her from dwelling too much on her uncertain outlook. On Monday evening it was said to be Miss Bacon's duty to act as entertainer.

"What are you going to give us to-night?" asked Mrs. Congrene. "Your talents are so varied, you have a wide range to select from."

"Now, Mother Congrene, that isn't fair. I was told Saturday night that the subjects were not elective!" exclaimed Marion.

"Very well, Marion," said Miss Bacon, good-naturedly, "you may choose my subject."

"I want you to tell us all about those queer creepy things,—spooks, crystal balls, old thoughts, new thoughts, and everything."

"I am afraid Miss Armstrong will think I am a witch, from the list of subjects you give me the honor of being acquainted with."

"Oh, I know you don't believe it all, but you do believe in telepathy, don't you?"

"Yes, to a certain extent."

"And you believe that souls can stand right up in their boots, and pull their bodies up after them, and"—

"It is no use to hedge, Miss Bacon," interrupted Mrs. Congrene. "When Marion begins to dissect, she uses a sharp knife, and everything must come to light."

"Why doesn't Marion start up an inquisition, and try to find out what each one believes? It is more simple to answer a few questions than to formulate our ideas, because so many of us hardly know what we do think. What do you want to get at, Marion?" asked Miss Page.

"All of it. You know there is a church over in Boston where the souls are invited to sit up in the front row, and the bodies are treated like second-hand furniture. I love it. Perhaps it is because my body is such a misfit to my mind, but I like to hear things that make me believe I have something besides this old body."

"You seem to me, Marion, to be convincing proof to a theory of that kind," said Dr. Ainslee.

"Won't you tell us, Marion, what your pet belief would be, if you could pick and choose?" asked Miss Merrill.

"I should just like to believe that our souls are at a big masquerade party, and no one can guess who is behind the mask. Don't you know Miss Bacon told us about the queer crystal-ball things last winter? It seems to me the pictures she saw must have been flash-lights from some unmasked souls."

"I did not pretend to believe it, Marion, you must remember," interrupted Miss Bacon, slightly embarrassed.

"I know you didn't, but that doesn't make it worthless to me. If the souls over in Boston have got so independent, they can keep right on having a good time while their bodies are too ill to sit up, why couldn't the souls who have no bodies hanging to them do little stunts of that kind?"

"You have been getting a wrong impression of the work that is being done at the Boston church. The good physician of the soul there believes that mutual respect for body and mind is conducive to health and happiness; that is, health for the physical body is helped by the content and well-being of the mind or soul, but if the body requires other attentions, he certainly does not advise neglect," counseled Dr. Ainslee.

"Don't you know," said Marion, "Miss Bacon told us of a woman who had been ill for years, and who worried so constantly she was worn to a skeleton? After she began the church treatment, her soul took the bits, and she scarcely remembered she had a body; but after a time she got curious, I suppose, so turned around to pass the time of day with her physical being, and she had grown so plump and beautiful, being left alone, she didn't recognize herself."

Miss Bacon laughed. "I remember a story

something like that, without the frills. It wouldn't be a bad remedy for us all to try."

"My face is warranted not to change," sighed Marion.

"Try my doses, mixed with content of the soul, and see if there are not results," smiled Dr. Ainslee. "I think we have had all of the mystical that is good for us to-night. I wish there was one among us worthy to open the piano."

"Don't you play, Miss Armstrong?" Marion asked, with sudden inspiration.

"Sometimes."

"Then make to-night one of the sometimes."

Margaret complied, and was overwhelmed with thanks and compliments.

"Why didn't you tell us you could play, the first night you were here?" asked Marion. "Then we could have been spared all that biographical business."

"But I should not have been entertained," returned Margaret.

"If I could play as you do," remarked Miss Bacon, "I should feel it was all the entertainment I needed."

"I engage her on the spot, as my substitute," announced Marion.

"I shall decline to act."

"That is right, Miss Armstrong," commended

Dr. Ainslee. "We mustn't forget our duty to Marion, in the matter."

"It is not discipline, I am considering. For some reason I feel very anxious to hear the finish of the story."

"It is a cruel arrangement to make us wait so long after hinting at mysteries."

Chapter XIX

ESTHER UNDERWOOD'S DISCLOSURE

Three weeks after Guthrie's visit, Winter received a note from Mrs. Underwood, saying that her daughter had told her of his kind offer to give her (the daughter) work, and she had taken the liberty to ask him if he could make it convenient, when he should chance to be in Boston, to call at her home.

He made it convenient immediately. The place was a few miles out from Boston, an attractive cottage, with a sunny garden. Mrs. Underwood, a placid, motherly woman, ushered him into a pleasant sitting-room.

"You are very kind to come so quickly, Mr. Hayward. I hope it has been no inconvenience," she said.

"No trouble whatever," responded Winter, cheerfully. "I am very glad to get your daughter to do the work for me."

"I don't know as it was necessary for you to come out, you might have sent it, but I wanted to be perfectly honest with you. I am not sure that Esther does good work. I can't judge, but I wanted to explain the situation to you, and tell you, if the work is not satisfactory, I shall not expect you to pay for it."

"That is both frank and fair, I am sure; but why do you have these misgivings?"

Mrs. Underwood flushed. "You know of course that Esther was in Mr. Floyd's office?"

"Yes."

"He is a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"If you don't mind, I should rather not own to any especial intimacy with him. I called to see him on business, and I knew him,—that was all."

Mrs. Underwood looked dazed. "He is a good man, isn't he?"

"You have the impression that he is, haven't you?"

"I certainly have. I should not have allowed Esther to have gone in his office if I hadn't felt so. I went in to see him, and thought he was very much of a gentleman."

"What was the trouble? Did he tell your daughter that her work was not satisfactory?"

"No, he didn't say that,—he just dismissed her; but I thought it was only a temporary matter, as he sent a check every Saturday for a larger amount than she was to have received. I was pleased at first, as I thought she was to go back on the increased pay. The child has not been herself, she has been so worried. I think she felt that her work was not well done, as she has kept saying she was sure Mr. Floyd

would not want her to go back, and I learned a few days ago she was right. I wrote and asked him if he was going to need her again, and he answered that he should not have work in the office, but he would be glad to pay her while she was not busy. I replied at once that I could not allow one of my children to accept money that had not been earned."

"Do you have any idea why he should propose such a thing?"

"No, unless he had heard in some way of our situation, and did it out of kindness. I have questioned Esther. She says she has not told him, but I thought he might have heard in some other way. I may as well explain what I mean. Last spring, after Esther got the position with Mr. Floyd, this house was for sale at a very low price. I thought it would be nice for us to have our own home, so I paid all I had, and promised to pay five hundred a year on the mortgage. Esther's salary would just do that, and I felt I could take care of the family with my needle; but now that Esther has lost her position, it is very different, and I thought it was possible Mr. Floyd had heard of it."

Winter shook his head incredulously. "Have you talked with your daughter?" he asked.

"No, she seemed to feel so badly, I have tried to keep her mind on other things."

"I am going to be very frank with you, Mrs. Underwood. Haze Floyd is a bad man, and utterly selfish. It may be he is afraid your daughter has learned things about him that might be discovered if she remained. Will you allow her to come in here and talk it over with us, and see if we can't get some light on his unusual generosity?"

Mrs. Underwood hesitated. "I can't subject Esther to any questions that will in any way trouble her, but I am more anxious than you can know to understand about it, as she is now sensitive about applying to the agency, after being obliged to leave Mr. Floyd."

"I will promise you, Mrs. Underwood, to be very careful about what I ask."

"Very well. I will call her."

Esther came up from the garden in a listless, discouraged manner, but when she saw Winter her face flushed, and she seemed half inclined to run away.

"This is Mr. Hayward, Esther. He has come to see you about the work he told you he would give you."

"Yes'm," she answered, looking from one to the other as though expecting or fearing something.

Winter came forward and shook hands. "I have brought in some stuff that I wish you would

take a look at, and see if you call it readable. If you can puzzle it out, I am very fortunate. I don't like dictating, so I just jot down things as they come to my mind, at odd moments, and I don't half write them. In fact, I don't often have time to write them properly at the moment I want to catch them. They are mostly on art. If they come out right, I may have them published."

Esther took a sheet and read easily.

"That is fine," Winter exclaimed enthusiastically. "I have had one or two people try to read these, and they couldn't do a thing with them,—don't believe I could myself; but I recognize what you read as my exact composition."

"Esther had quite a record for deciphering all kinds of writing, in the school last winter," said Mrs. Underwood, a little proudly.

"It is an art," commended Winter, "and I am very glad to have the benefit of it. Do you think you will like the work at home, as well as in Mr. Floyd's office?"

Esther looked up startled, as though the allusion to Mr. Floyd meant a pitfall.

"I don't know, sir, but I shall like being with mother."

"Didn't you like Mr. Floyd?" Winter asked kindly.

Esther was frightened. Her breath came

fast, and she looked toward her mother, as though trying to discover how much she knew.

"Esther, dear," the mother said gently, after a few moments of silence. "Do you think that Mr. Floyd is a good man?"

The blow had fallen. She knew now that Mr. Hayward had told her mother about the marriage certificate. She threw herself into Mrs. Underwood's arms.

"I thought he was a good man, and you thought so too, mother," she sobbed.

"Yes, I know I did; we both thought so, Esther." She smoothed her hair, with those soft mother-touches. "Tell me all about it, dear," she whispered.

"Won't Mr. Hayward tell it? He knows."

"No, Esther; I would rather you would tell me."

"I know I ought to have told you before, but he said his aunt, who had been very kind to him, would be so angry for him to marry, he didn't dare to let any one know."

Mrs. Underwood paled. "Yes, dear," she encouraged calmly. "Commence at the very first. It is right for you to tell me, and you will feel better for it."

"Yes, I know I shall. It is what I wanted to do all the time, but Mr. Floyd got so cross when I begged to tell you, I didn't dare."

"But it is all right now, Esther, so go on."

"Well, first he told me"— She hesitated, and looked at Winter.

"Don't mind Mr. Hayward. You say he knows."

"He told me"— She hesitated again, trying to get hold of the right thread, to make it unravel easily. "He told me he wanted me to marry him. He got the paper,—I think he called it a license."

"Yes, Esther, go on."

"He gave that to me, and said it was the same as though we were married, but I knew people stood up before the minister or some one to be married, so he said he would have the minister marry us, only I mustn't tell you, on account of his aunt. She had been so good to him, you know."

"Where were you married?" the mother asked.

"I don't know where it was, but it was a beautiful room."

"And did you have the marriage certificate?"

"No, Mr. Floyd put that in his safe."

"And the other paper?"

"He gave that to me the day he got it, but he wanted me to bring it back, to put in the safe with the certificate."

"Did you do it?"

"No, I couldn't. I put it in the writing-box you gave me, and you know you locked that in the chest, up in the attic."

"Was Mr. Floyd displeased?"

"Yes, he didn't like it at all. Oh, mother! you understand why I didn't tell you, don't you? I never kept anything from you in my life before."

"Yes, I understand. You and mother were both deceived in Mr. Floyd."

"But isn't he really a good man, mother?" Esther asked anxiously.

"It wasn't nice for him to want to deceive me."

"I know that wasn't."

"Esther, the key to the chest is in the top drawer of the sewing-machine. Get it, and go up and bring down the little writing-box."

After she had left the room, Winter said, "Mrs. Underwood, I did not expect disclosures of this kind."

"I thought perhaps you didn't." She apparently found it difficult to maintain her composure.

"I should have been rather loath to agitate such a subject."

"I thank you with all my heart, for doing so," she replied.

When Esther came in with the little box, which she had unlocked, her mother asked;

"Don't you want to start Mr. Hayward's work, Esther?"

And Esther seemed only too glad to get away. Mrs. Underwood opened the box, took the paper, glanced over it, then passed it to Winter.

He read it carefully. "Mrs. Underwood, I believe this is genuine. That was why Floyd was so anxious to get hold of it. Are you willing for me to take it?"

Mrs. Underwood hesitated, passed her hand over her brow.

"No, no," Winter hastened to say, "you keep this, just give me a copy."

"I think I would as soon you would take it. I feel as though I am not a judge of what is best."

"That isn't strange, after the experience you have had with Floyd. I may be an accomplice."

"Oh, no; I am sure it is all right."

"But a copy is all I need." And he produced pen and paper. "Do you want your daughter to marry Floyd, Mrs. Underwood?"

"If he has trapped her into a sham marriage, I do. She has always been like a little child, although she was very bright at her studies, and happy in them. She had passed her third year at the academy, and I blame myself for not keeping her there; but I hardly felt I could afford it, as there was no profitable work I could get to do in a country town."

Winter assured her he would give all the aid in his power to straighten out matters.

Chapter XX

AN INTERVIEW WITH HAZE FLOYD

Winter had not seen Guthrie for three weeks, neither had he heard from him. He had left his New Hampshire address, but they understood each other enough not to feel obliged to write, if there was nothing to say. The day after Winter's interview with Mrs. Underwood, he sent Guthrie a telegram. It read: "A clue. Come at once."

In less than an hour he appeared at Winter's hotel.

"How on earth did you get here in so short a time?" Winter exclaimed.

"I wasn't far away. The telegram was forwarded to my address here in Boston."

"Are you stopping in Boston?"

"Yes, I have been keeping an eye on Floyd."

"Find out anything?"

"No, but it seemed something to watch him. What have you got?"

Winter related what he had learned.

"Do you believe the license is genuine?"

"Yes, I know it is. I have been to the City Clerk. He knows Floyd, and remembers when he got the paper, and there are several others

who can identify him. Don't you see, he was afraid to let a sham go out of his hands; he could have been pulled up for forgery."

"I see. How are you going to proceed?"

"It looks like rather a bad job for Haze to have a bona fide marriage certificate to one woman, with no divorce, and the woman still living, and an equally legal marriage license to another one."

Guthrie's face showed comprehension. "How soon are you going to act?" he asked.

"As soon as possible, before Haze gets wind of it. I want you to stand by me. I have engaged two policemen, and got a warrant for his arrest, also a search warrant; but if we can use palliative remedies, all the better. We want to make sure of the marriage certificate to Miss Armstrong first. To let him understand what weapons we have to use, I propose that I go to his office and ask to see the paper again. You and the policemen stay outside. If he allows me to see it, I will whistle, and you can come in at once; but if he scents something and doesn't let me see it, I will call you, and we will do what we can with an arrest and a search warrant. I am glad you are in the city. Been to New York to see about your abiding-place?"

"No, I couldn't seem to settle down to it. Have you looked up an office yet?"

"Yes, and I have had great luck, considering what I wanted. Phil stipulated, if we were to be together, that there should be a balcony from your private office, and French doors from it to the balcony, so that your desk could be wheeled out and in."

"Was there anything Fairchild didn't think of?" asked Guthrie.

Winter went to Floyd's office the next morning, as soon as he was sure Haze was there. When he asked to see the certificate again, Floyd remarked:

"I don't believe it has changed during the past few weeks."

"Haven't I the right to see it? I am Miss Armstrong's attorney."

"Oh, you are looking into the legality of the thing," sneered Floyd. "I have no objection to having you see it again, as you can't find a flaw in it." He took the paper out, but kept it in his hands, remarking: "I feel safer, with so zealous a lawyer, to hold this in my own hands. You can read it all right at this distance."

Winter took his eye-glasses out slowly, and began meditatively to whistle. The door opened, and Guthrie came in with the two policemen.

"Do your duty, gentlemen," said Winter. Floyd was at once arrested, and the paper secured.

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Floyd. Then, recognizing Guthrie, he contemptuously remarked: "I haven't any boots to black. Why are you here?"

"If your boots are half as black as your soul, Haze, they don't need doctoring," said Winter, calmly.

"But what is the meaning of this insult?"

"Don't you understand, Haze? You are liable for attempted bigamy."

"What proof have you, to bear out that accusation?"

"Here is this certificate, for one thing. The woman named in it is not dead, neither have you a divorce."

"Haven't I right to a wife?"

"To be sure, but only one. I have a marriage license to one Esther Underwood, procured by you. Doesn't it look a little like attempted bigamy?"

"Damn her!"

"She is *going* to be, all right, for you are going to marry her."

"I am not!"

"Yes, you are. If you do not feel like marrying her like a Christian, in her own home, you may prefer to do so in jail."

"How in hell am I going to marry her, if I have one wife?"

Guthrie rose suddenly, but sat down.

"You are to explain that to us," said Winter.

"I have nothing to explain."

"You must have. If you don't, you know the alternative."

Floyd looked daggers. He glanced toward the door, and Winter, remembering his agility, said, "Better put on the cuffs, Mr. Brown."

Haze snarled like a caged tiger, but after a few moments flung out, "State your damned conditions."

"We want you for once to tell the truth. We don't ask you to go beyond that."

"What then?"

"After you have explained the sham in regard to your marriage with Miss Armstrong, I want you to put your name to the explanation, and these gentlemen will witness it. This will make you free to marry, as I have taken measures to have this made null and void, on the presentation of your acknowledgment. Then we are to be guests at your marriage with Miss Underwood. It will be proper for Guthrie and me to be on hand, as we are to be appointed guardians for her. As a little wedding present, you are to give the bride five thousand dollars."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I can't."

"Yes, you will, Haze. I know where you bank. We will go around and see how large a check they will countenance."

"What right have you to make these conditions? Do you represent justice?"

"That is a foolish question. You know perfectly well what we shall do,—turn you over to the law. You will be taken care of, for a time at least. In one way, I should prefer a residence for you at the state hotel, as you couldn't be a public nuisance while you are there; but we are going to deal gently with you, unless you choose to have your office closed, for this trick you have played ought to disbar you when you are at large again."

Floyd moved angrily. "Well, if it is any satisfaction to you, that paper is no good."

"Wait a moment. I want your sworn statement." He opened the door and ushered in another man. The statement was made to the effect that Floyd had hired some person to marry him, under the name of Margaret Armstrong.

"Who was the woman to act the part?" asked Winter.

"I don't remember.'

"Do you know where she is?"

"No, I haven't seen or heard of the person from that day to this."

"We shall have to wait a few days, until I can get this fixed up, to attend your wedding with Miss Underwood."

Floyd brightened.

"But the gift to the bride must be made to-day."

Floyd made some protest, but finally produced the required amount.

Chapter XXI

ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF RISETON

There had been whispers in Riseton that Winter Hayward was to be married. Just how the rumor started, no one could tell. It was decided that the Hayward family was not pleased with the prospect, or knew nothing about it. Either decision was not regarded as favorable to their satisfaction, as it was thought if he was really engaged and the family was not aware of it, it must be a very unfortunate affair. Mary Hayward's engagement to George Gould seemed little less than a catastrophe. Although the store with its attractive supplies, and the polite clerks whom George Gould had presided over, were disposed of before the engagement was announced, there were various remarks in regard to it. Some shook their heads and said:

"Mary Hayward wouldn't have done that ten years ago."

Others would sigh: "Mary is getting on; she is nearly thirty-three. Her chances are not what they were." However, the general verdict was that she was acting the part well. She was apparently determined to glorify the deed.

George Gould was to be connected with a well-established business house. The change was not to afford *him* any especial enjoyment, excepting to know that Mary was better pleased. Mr. Hayward regarded the transference pityingly, as he knew that George Gould was being robbed of a precious right,—the right to battle with fate, and achieve credit from his own endeavors. The business that was to absorb him, or into which he was to be pushed, with the help of Mr. Hayward's money and influence, was old, dignified and conservative. There was no chance for brain athletics, no opportunity to take deep draught from the fountain of hope and ambition. He would plod on behind half a dozen or more men whose heart-beats might occasionally be accelerated by the ticker, but who did not approve of fluctuations of the pulse in any junior member of the firm. Even the grocery business had given more scope for mental development, but Mary was satisfied,—that was the point. It was the woman's vanity that must be considered, not the man's life.

Mrs. Gordon, who had regarded Mary Hayward with keen ill-favor since her pointed indifference to Mina, hugged the news of her engagement to George Gould rapturously. She learned of it from Carrie Mason, just before her dinner hour, but physical demands were forgotten, as she

wrote page after page to Mina of what this one said and that one thought, closing the letter triumphantly by wondering if Mary would forget about the shock society got when George Gould asked Mrs. Apin at the Bacale reception if the peas he had sent her got there in time for dinner. She felt a strong desire that this episode should not be forgotten, but found people were not anxious to remember it. She gradually became aware that the conditions were not to be changed; that after the first surprised and involuntary remarks criticism had subsided, and Mary Hayward was to hold the same old sway; also that George Gould, who was liked by every one, with an indulgent toleration of his peculiarities, was to be baptized in the fire of Mary's ambition and popularity. The Haywards had accepted the situation, as became them. Jennie was the one at this time to keep up the conversation. "Do you know," she began one day at dinner after an unusually long silence, "Mrs. Gordon asks me every time I see her if Winter is going to be married soon."

"What of that?" inquired Mr. Hayward. "It is the most common question in the world for a woman to ask."

"I should feel very sorry for Winter to become engaged to any one we cannot approve of," said Mrs. Hayward, a trifle stiffly.

"That is easily managed," remarked Mr. Hayward. "I shall make up my mind not to disapprove. It wouldn't be my business to, if Winter is satisfied. I guess the boy has got sense enough to look out and get the right one, mother, so we needn't borrow trouble."

"I know what Mrs. Gordon thinks," said Mary, after the waitress had left the room. "You know that Miss Armstrong who boarded with her last winter? Don't you remember, she wrote up the October reception?"

"Well, what about her?" Mr. Hayward asked, as Mary hesitated.

"Mrs. Gordon has told several that Winter was very attentive to her."

"Nice-looking girl, if I remember right," remarked Mr. Hayward, calmly.

"But we know nothing about her," Mary ventured.

"What do we want to know? And for that matter, what do we know about any one? We have to take people on trust. But Winter doesn't know where that young woman is, does he?"

"Mr. Webster told Miss Parton that he fancied she had gone to New York."

"New York is quite a village for people to meet in accidentally."

"But it might not be accidental," Mary persisted.

"Then it would be incidental," returned Mr. Hayward, grimly sarcastic.

"But wouldn't you rather Winter would marry a"—

"A what?" interrupted Mr. Hayward. "A lord's sister, or cousin, or aunt, do you mean? No, I wouldn't. I hope he will marry some nice, sensible, jolly girl, of moderate means."

"But you don't mean a nobody, father,—a woman who works for her living!"

"A nobody, because she works!" cried Mr. Hayward, testily. "I can't understand this silly pride women take in being helpless, useless creatures. Your mother knew how to work, and worked when we were married. I think we should have had a poor time in the world if she hadn't. And I hope Winter will get a wife who knows how to do things. Our prayer now ought to be that he will not marry any one who might be shocked at George Gould's shortcomings."

Mary blushed.

"Anyway, we know who his antecedents were, father," she retorted.

"To be sure. His grandfather was an honest old farmer, as both of your grandfathers were; but there was a time, Mary, after you left school, that farmers became pretty poor stock in your estimation. However, that was before you had decided to marry a greengrocer."

"Don't, father." Mary was almost in tears.

"There, there, Mary," said her father, soothingly. "I know George isn't a greengrocer now,—not because he dislikes grocering, but because he likes a silly girl who doesn't approve of grocering as a profession. George is a fine fellow. I would give more for him than half a dozen earls, even if he has spent the best ten years of his life selling molasses and salt codfish; and I am glad you are old enough to come to your senses."

"I always liked George, father," she asserted half-heartedly, as she recalled the many slights and snubs he had received from her during her younger days, when her prospects of marriage seemed rather brighter.

"Yes, yes," her father agreed; "but what is more, George liked you back in the early days, does now, and always will, I sincerely hope."

"Mrs. Gordon says that Winter promised to invite her to his wedding, when he gets married," said Jennie, innocently stumbling in with another subject for them to toss back and forth.

"Why shouldn't he invite her? Nancy Gordon is a good woman."

There was silence for a few moments, but Mr. Hayward knew there were dissenting opinions.

"Why isn't Nancy Gordon as good as any one in Riseton?" he demanded, settling his eye-

glasses, and glancing from Mrs. Hayward to Mary.

"Nancy Gordon is all right in her place, James," Mrs. Hayward sniffed.

"She is all right in any place in Riseton."

"But you know, father," began Mary, encouraged by her mother's remark, "I shouldn't want some of my friends to meet Mrs. Gordon."

"Mary," spoke up Mr. Hayward, slowly and sternly, "if you don't cleanse your mind of some of these ideas, I shall decline to assist in what you regard as the elevation of George Gould."

"You have given George your word already," cried Mary, frightened by her father's manner.

"A poor promise is better broken than kept. If I have got to choose between making an idiot or a sensible human being of one of my children, a broken word doesn't count in such an issue. I am afraid, as the wife of a broker, you will continue to cultivate these foolish ideas."

"Don't, James. You know perfectly well you will do as you have promised," interrupted Mrs. Hayward.

"I know nothing of the kind. I want it understood, first and last, if Winter marries, his wife is to be treated as one of the family, even if she is a Fiji Islander. The whole thing began on

this subject, and I don't propose to re-gild a son-in-law for the edification of my family and have a daughter-in-law held up to ridicule."

"Father, I'll promise to be very nice to any one Winter may marry," said Mary, humbly.

"That is right, daughter; and don't forget it."

When Mr. Hayward left the table he felt he had won a point. There had been constant gibes at Winter's future wife, as it seemed a foregone conclusion that he would not be influenced by pride or ambition. Consequently it was thought he would stoop below his level. The present anxiety of Mr. Hayward to avert any possible indignity to Winter was due to the fact that he fancied his son had been attracted to Miss Armstrong and of course could not imagine a refusal possible.

"Don't repeat any more gossip from Mrs. Gordon, Jennie," Mary Hayward remarked irritably, after Mr. Hayward had left the house. "I am sick and tired of hearing the things she says, she is so shockingly common; and you always seem to be seeing her and listening to her talk. Where did you see her to-day?"

"At the Sewing Circle. She always seems so interested in Winter, and speaks as though she likes him."

"That is what makes it so disgusting. She seems so familiar and intimate with him.

Winter's friends are enough to make any one blush. I wish he had a little proper pride."

"Why, Mary," Jennie remonstrated, loath to hear her dearly beloved brother criticized. "Winter always stands up for every one. Don't you remember how he stood by George Gould when"—

"Stop!" cried Mary, in a rage. "Don't talk any more. Winter never had ambition enough to appreciate his privileges. If I were a man, wouldn't I make something of my life? Should I be satisfied to settle down to such friends as he cultivates? I am not a man, I am hampered; but I still have a semblance of pride left, and I can't stand your silly babbling, Jennie."

"I didn't mean to trouble you, Mary. Dr. Everson was there, and he and Mrs. Gordon both spoke so nicely of Winter. Dr. Everson said his wife ought to be a happy woman, and Dr. Everson always seems very nice to Mrs. Gordon."

"Don't you understand that it is one of his duties to treat all the members of his church politely?" Mrs. Hayward asked a little severely, as though it was something of a serious task to instill the proper ideas into Jennie's mental equipment, and Jennie, with her immature brain and maturer years, was groping about in her sweet and kindly mind for the explanation of it all.

Chapter XXII

MARION BARTON CONCLUDES HER STORY

As the weather was very hot in New York that summer, the music was the only entertainment looked forward to at Mrs. Congrene's home. Margaret often played in the twilight, after dinner.

Marion took a serious cold, which left her quite hoarse, so there were no further requests for the last chapter of her life; but frequent allusions were made to it and to the mystery of the brown suit, to remind her that it was not forgotten. It was not until the second week in October, however, that there seemed a fitting time for the continuance of it. There had been but one change in the house, Miss Hero had gone to a school in Washington, and a Miss Crabtree, who had filled her position in New York, had come to Mrs. Congrene's to live. The evening that the subject was brought up was chilly and rainy. A bright fire was glowing on the living-room hearth.

"Isn't this a good night for Marion to go on with the story of her life?" asked Mrs. Congrene, as they came in from dinner.

"That thought had just occurred to me,"

said Margaret, who was now feeling less self-abasement, and more like one of them. "I don't know why, but it came in my mind very forcibly."

"I know," said Marion. "You want to torture me."

"I am sure you ought to want me to hear it, Marion, after all the nice doses I have given you this summer,—and do you know, they have worked wonders. Don't you think so, Miss Armstrong?"

"Yes indeed, I do. Marion has turned her mirror to the wall, or I am sure she would be getting vain."

"Turned her mirror to the wall!" exclaimed Dr. Ainslee. "I never heard of such a thing."

"No, I don't suppose you ever did," spoke up Marion. "Because you have no reason to be unhappy every time you look in yours. I am happy, but I don't want to get hardened, all the same, and I am afraid that I should if I got too intimate with a mirror."

"Do you remember where you left off in your story?" Mrs. Congrene asked.

"No, so I don't know where to begin."

"I will prompt you," called Miss Merrill, who was worrying the fire. "You had just left Paxton, while Uncle Ben and Aunt Sarah were at the fair."

"There isn't anything more worth telling. Miss Armstrong will play. That will be worth while."

"Not to-night, Marion," said Margaret.

"Well, here goes, then," she sighed, slipping into a seat beside Mrs. Congrene. "I wrote to Uncle Ben as soon as I got into Boston, so that he would not feel anxious, and he wrote back, if I ever wanted money enough to get me to Paxton, he would send it, but not another cent. I went to the Young Women's Christian Association, and found I could wait on table in the dining-room there, to pay my living expenses. After the first year I got a scholarship at the art school, but my bit of money kept dwindling."

"Did you study summers?" asked Miss Merrill.

"No, I worked at a publishing house, and did various things there. I didn't get rich,—it just kept me going; but in March of my third year, just before I got my diploma, I heard they were not going to need any extra help at the publishing house, as their orders had been so small."

"I don't like this part," said Dr. Ainslee. "It is harrowing, and makes me feel sad that I wasn't there to help you out."

"Oh, I wasn't a bit bad off. I knew something would turn up to make things all right. I haven't told you about Dicky Bond yet, have I?"

"No, we are not acquainted with Dick," replied Miss Merrill.

"He was in the art school a few months my second year, and came back the third year, to finish up what he had commenced. He wanted to get ideas of lines to fit him, with the aid of his camera, to do illustrating for the newspapers. I think he was about fifteen. He looked half-starved that last year, and confided to a few of us that he was pinched for money. Here is where the brown suit comes in. I bought it the second winter I was in Boston. It was a markdown and didn't cost much, but to me it was very precious. I had tucked together a hat to match it, so occasionally I made myself gorgeous. One day the last of March, when I was feeling especially feeble in my spirits, I put it on, to cheer me up. I had just got to the school, when Dicky Bond rushed up to me and asked if we were not about the same height. I hadn't thought about it before, but it seemed as though we were. I asked him what on earth he meant, and he said if I would go home and put the suit and hat in boxes, he would call for them, and if he could wear the suit, he would pay me fifty dollars for the use of them that afternoon. I didn't stand on the order of my going, but went. When Dicky called, I took the things down, and he told

me a gentleman wanted to play an April First joke on a lady, and had offered to pay him one hundred dollars, if he would dress up as a girl, go to Providence, and pretend to marry him by the lady's name. Of course Dicky couldn't go to a store and get a suit, wearing boys' clothes, so my dress was the only hope. It suited him finely. He came to the Association in the evening, said that he had to splice the belt, but the long coat came down, so it didn't show; and with a heavy veil over his hat, and a fur that came up around his neck, he looked quite stylish. If it had not been for the fifty dollars, I could not have come to New York. With it, I came here, got my position, and have been happy ever since."

"What became of Dicky?" Margaret asked anxiously.

"He is here in New York, doing finely. I think it was the nicest April-fool joke I ever heard. Now that is the end of me. I have given you everything from the cradle to the grave,—Gramercy, I mean."

"Was that a year last March?" Margaret inquired.

"Yes, I think it was the thirtieth."

"It was a queer joke, I think," said Mrs. Congrene. "I can't see the point of it."

"Neither can I," said Dr. Ainslee. "I hope it was nothing worse than a foolish joke."

"I should think if there was any joke about it, it must have been on the man who paid one hundred dollars for it," said Miss Merrill. "Did Dicky Bond know anything about the man?"

"Yes, he had been in the art school a few years before. I never thought there was anything wrong about it."

"Do you remember what the man's name was?" asked Margaret. "Or perhaps Dicky Bond did not know."

"Yes, he did. It seems to me it was something like Flood or Ford. I have it written on something in my room. I will try to find it if you will come upstairs." Margaret waited but a few moments, before Marion brought the bit of paper on which she had written the name. "It was Floyd," Marion announced briefly and absent-mindedly. She was glancing at a closely written scrap of paper.

"Have you a letter?" Margaret asked mechanically.

"Yes, Sarah must have left it after I went down to dinner. It is from Uncle Ben. He is coming to New York for a few days. I wish you would read it."

Margaret took the letter. It read:

"dere neec i take my pen in hand, to inform you that i shal leav hear saterday the 14th

and expek to arriv in nu york sunday, jest afore noon. i shal taik a wagen at the depo, so you dont need to fret aboot your uncle Ben.

P.S. it may be ni to one, afore i git there."

"Where will he stay?" asked Margaret, as calmly as though the letter had been a grammatically composed epistle.

"Wouldn't he enjoy the Wordolf?" asked Marion, going off in a gale of laughter. "I am going to see Dicky Bond," she continued, sobering. "He has a nice, respectable boarding-place, and will be company for Uncle Ben, if by luck they have a vacant room there."

Uncle Ben arrived as he had predicted, just before one. Mrs. Congrene had proposed that he should dine with them, but Marion had declined the invitation, saying she had arranged that they should take dinner with Dick Bond.

"Well, Mary Ann, how be ye?" said Uncle Ben, heartily, kissing her with emphasis. He was standing at the front door, where Marion had met him, his heavy telescope valise in his hand. "Kin I put this saratogy down somewheres?" he asked, as Marion drew him into the hall.

"Yes, yes, anywhere," she replied, trying not to see the bulgy affair. "I want you to come in and get acquainted with my friends, Uncle Ben."

He put the valise down carefully, then looked about the hall. "Ain't you sorter puttin' on airs, Mary Ann?" he asked softly.

"Why, of course I am. What is the use of living, unless you do it in good shape? This is Mrs. Congrene, the good lady who is taking care of me, Uncle Ben."

Mrs. Congrene had come into the hall, in her hospitable way, to assist in the welcome.

"Congrin, Congrin," Uncle Ben repeated. "Ain't any relation to the Congrins uster live down Syracuse way, air ye? Ye ain't? Well, I didn't know but ye might be. It seemed a leetle as though ye favored Hannah Congrin. She was a real nice girl—married Steve Joice. He warn't much himself, but was great on close. They moved up our way after he'd all fushed out, but he"—

"How are you, Uncle Ben?" interrupted Marion, eager to stop him on the Congrene history.

"Oh, I'm all jacked up with rheumatiz," he replied, following the advice to be seated, "but I'd orter be thankful to be alive, I s'pose; and you, Mary Ann, you're looking putty pert."

"Of course I'm proud of my looks, Uncle Ben," returned Marion, sarcastically.

"Well, well," he murmured. "If that ain't 'bout as cheeky as anything I ever heard, I don't

know. Hope you ain't flatterin' 'er to 'er face," he said, turning to Mrs. Congrene.

"I don't know if you would call it flattery or not, Mr. Barton. We think she is rather a nice girl to look at."

"Oh, she looks well 'nough," he said, eyeing her critically, "but as I alus told 'er, 'Putty is that putty does.' She's all Hitchcock. Complected exactly like 'em,—red hair, black eyes and all. She looks 'nough like Mary Ann Hitchcock to be 'er own girl. She merrid a Rogers, from out Elmiry way. Real smart kind of a feller. Run a grocery business someweres round out there. I remember when I wus a little shaver the Roger youngones uster come up there rigged out ter kill. There wus two or three boys amongst 'em that felt they were some punkins. I rec'lect that one of 'em, done some fancy han'springs, an' one thing 'nother, to show off, the fust day he got there, an' one er our boys got kinder riled at his airs, an' sung out, 'Bet you can't throw Ben Barton.' He warn't takin' no dares, so he off with his coat, all ready fer a rastle. I down him in about a jiffy. Don' knows I ever done anything tickled the boys more, but he was all"—

"How is Aunt Sarah?" interrupted Marion.

"She ain't over 'n above well, but ye know

when she gits started doin' anything, she never knows when to quit, an' she's tougher 'n tripe some ways. She's all Dunbar,—they was the stoutest tribe in some ways I ever see. Why, old Jake Dunbar had an old hoss that balked like time, an' he uster take the horse out an' haul the load himself, and, by George, he shamed that nag outer his contrary fits jest that way. I rec'lect we was haulin' ceder ties once fer the new railroad, an' he had one er his dumbfounded spells, and Jake"—

"I know what he did, Uncle Ben; he just held on to his temper, and made that poor old beast see what a superior creature he was, both in strength and patience."

"Guess that's 'bout the size of it," laughed Uncle Ben.

"You see, I could understand it, for that was the kind of medicine I was brought up on."

"Yer did uster have awful tantrums, didn't yer, Mary Ann? I rec'lect yer Aunt Sarah was trying to git yer ready for school once, an' was havin' a norful time, an' ses I, 'Tain't no use,—she's all Hitchcock; an' what's born in the bone can't be cured by sulphur.' There warnt much Hitchcock in me; I was all Barton, sorter easy-goin'. I rec'lect when Uncle Jerry Hitchcock uster say they'd never have to drive me with a W bit, but I've pulled long, and I

remember Uncle Jerry said, after I was growed, that"—

"I should have given him a piece of my mind, if I had heard any complaints about you, Uncle Ben," spoke up Marion. There were hectic spots in her cheeks, and she was twisting her fingers nervously.

"Don't doubt it a bit," chuckled Uncle Ben. "You wus allus a pert upstart, ready to give yer idees free-gratis, fur nothin'. I rec'lect you wus 'bout knee high to a grasshopper when old Boynton come roun', askin' "—

"Please, Uncle Ben, don't tell about my badness now,—I have tried to keep it dark, and no one suspects what an imp I was. We are engaged to eat dinner with a friend of mine and must be getting started."

"I should like very much to have you dine with us, Mr. Barton, but Marion seems to think you would enjoy going to your room first."

"Yes, yes, I s'pose so," he said a little uneasily. The stimulus of his début was wearing off, leaving him less loquacious and a trifle embarrassed.

"I am selfish, Uncle Ben. I want you all to myself," Marion hastened to say, noticing the change. "I am going to telephone for a carriage, and while it is getting here I want you to meet some more of my friends. I know you

will like them. They have all been so good to me."

"What'd you say 'bout a kerrige?" he asked sharply. "How fur is it we air goin'? If 'tain't more 'n a mile, I'm good fer footin' it."

"Oh, it's too far for you to carry your grip, Uncle Ben."

"I ain't got nothin' but my valise," he remonstrated helplessly; but before he could say more, the rest of the household was marshaled in and presented to him. He shook hands with the cordiality of an old schoolmate, but his few words of interrogation were less spontaneous, as "How do you do, marm?" accompanied each shake.

When Marion returned that evening, instead of looking tired and discouraged, as had been anticipated, she seemed a new heroic creature. They greeted her effusively, hoping to drive away any unpleasant recollections.

Chapter XXIII

THE SHAM MARRIAGE EXPLAINED

Margaret had never fully realized how very hard the trial of the past few months had been, until there was a hope that the cloud would be lifted. She wrote Winter Hayward that night, giving him the details of what she had learned, and asking his advice as to what steps to take, to free her from her false position. She expected a letter in reply to her questions, but late Friday afternoon came home to find him seated in the little reception-room at the end of the hall.

"This is so good of you, Mr. Hayward!" were her first words after the surprised greeting.

"Is it?" he asked. "I like to have people call me good, so I will let it pass for that, and not explain that I have been wanting to see you for a month, as I had something to tell you."

"To tell me?"

"Yes, Haze Floyd make a sworn confession that he hired some one to act your part in Providence. I naturally supposed it was a woman, but that doesn't signify."

"Then I shall have nothing to do?" There was a tone of relief in her words. She had been facing the ordeal with shrinking bravery.

"No," he replied slowly, "and if there had been no confession, there would have been no need for action. I see you do not know that Haze Floyd is dead."

"Dead!" Margaret echoed, aghast at the news.

"Yes, I hoped at the time you would see the mention of it in the papers."

"How did he die?"

"That seems a question. There was just a brief article in the papers, saying he had committed suicide in a little Rhode Island town, but when I was in Riseton— I am living in New York now, you know."

"Are you?"

"Yes, I have been here since the first of September. As I was saying, I saw the notice in the paper, and started immediately for Boston, but stopped off at Riseton for the day, and called on Mrs. Gordon. She says a great many people believe he was murdered by an Italian. It happened in the town where Mina lives. Don't you remember Mrs. Gordon spoke of him as being on some case there?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, he has gone to his grave as a suicide, but I am inclined to think, from Mrs. Gordon's report, that he had a little first aid from the Italian."

"How did he happen to confess about the

sham marriage?" asked Margaret, grateful that she was released by his acknowledgment rather than by his death.

"That is a long story," but he related the whole affair.

"And did he really marry the girl at last?"

"Oh, yes, good and strong. My friend Guthrie and I were witnesses."

"Guthrie?" repeated Margaret, inquiringly. Her face was pale. She seemed to compel herself, by a strenuous effort, to a composure almost beyond her.

"Oh, I haven't told you about Guthrie, have I? He was the man who did so much for Phil Fairchild. Didn't I tell you Phil called him King?"

Margaret nodded, but did not speak.

"Well, he is everything Phil thought him. We are working together now. He was tremendously interested in ferreting out Haze Floyd's various iniquities. He is so fine he can't comprehend in the least the kind of a man Haze was. Let me see, what was I telling you about Floyd's young wife?"

Margaret tried to rally her mental forces, but her mind seemed to grasp but one fact. "It was sad, wasn't it,—the young girl, I mean?" she murmured.

"It wasn't so bad as it might have been, because when she learned he had not really

married her when she thought he had, her idol fell. She had worshiped him for his goodness, benevolence, and all those charming qualities Haze seemed to carry about in his voice and manner when he felt so inclined. I hope she recalls him as a bad man. She is only a child. Perhaps she may think he is the only one in the world, as fortunately she is not old enough to be cynical."

"What has become of her?'

"She is in an academy in Vermont, finishing the course that was broken when her mother brought her to Boston. She is to enter college next year, and I think from what the mother writes is fairly happy."

"Her mother is able to send her to college?" Margaret asked mechanically.

"She is able to send herself, besides looking after the mother, and giving the other children the same advantages she is having.

"She got a share of Mr. Floyd's money, I suppose."

"She got all Guthrie and I could manage to grasp for her. They have enough to keep them comfortable. They wouldn't care for more than they have, I think."

"Then Floyd did not live quite in vain?"

"This last was in keeping with his life. If he did any good, it was unintentional."

"Miss Armstrong," called a voice, "are you downstairs?"

"Yes, Marion, I am in the reception-room. Won't you come in?"

"I like the way you say reception-room," Marion's voice floated in from the hall. "You expand this little box into a spacious apartment. Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not know you had company."

"Do come in," beseeched Margaret, as Marion seemed inclined to beat a retreat. She named them hastily to each other, before Marion could escape.

"I am not company, Miss Barton; I am one of the family."

"Are you? I am very glad to see you, then. Miss Armstrong has never told me about her family."

"It is to the human family I refer," said Winter, smiling.

"I think I see a slight resemblance," Marion returned, surveying him critically. "You know you often do in distinguished families."

Winter gave a low amused laugh at the retort.

"Do you think the family I mentioned distinguished? Don't you call it rather more ordinary than otherwise?"

"I think it wouldn't be very polite for me to criticize your family at our first meeting."

"I believe, Marion," remarked Margaret, "that you and Mr. Hayward must have been trained in the same school as to the use of your tongues."

"I remember it," said Marion. "I was a beautiful child, and Mr. Hayward was just a red-headed little boy."

"I hope I had an artistic soul, and appreciated my copper locks."

"That reminds me," said Margaret. "You and Miss Barton *are* related in one way. You are both artists."

"Do you plead guilty to being a disciple of art, Miss Barton?"

"There is about as much difference between what I do and art as there is between duck and dimity. I just do illustrating, but I like it."

"Is your work for stories?"

"Yes, mostly. I read the story, and try to make the characters look the part. Sometimes I have to make hideous people, and I don't like that. It seems to be taking a mean advantage, to make people ugly when they are helpless to prevent it. But if I have to, I always try to add some redeeming touch, to still my conscience."

"I wonder," said Winter, turning to Margaret, "if Miss Barton adds the same tender strokes

I do. I think it is my best gift to them. But Mrs. Gordon felt differently. She had noticed the tendency on other heads in my shop, and stipulated that there was to be no copper in her hair, said she would rather be grayer than a badger than red-headed."

Margaret laughed. "Then Mrs. Gordon had her portrait finished?"

"Yes, and I fancy she was rather well pleased with it."

"I think she should have been, if the red hair was left out," said Marion.

"You and I differ in our artistic fancies, Miss Barton," said Winter, rising. "May I come again, Miss Armstrong? I want to convert Miss Barton from her perverted tastes, and may I bring my friend Guthrie?"

"Certainly," Margaret replied, flushing. "We shall be very happy to see you and your friend at any time, shall we not, Marion?"

Marion acquiesced, but with a slight reserve.

"That is very affable, I am sure," said Winter, as he shook hands.

Marion looked flushed at dinner. She was, however, rather quiet, and suggested to Margaret that they should go directly to their rooms. The family was alarmed, and Dr. Ainslee insisted on seeing the tongue and counting the pulse.

"There is nothing the matter with me, except-

ing I realize once in a while how homely I am, and it gives me the shivers to think how I must look to other people."

"Then I shall waste no pity on you, you foolish girl," returned Dr. Ainslee.

"I wanted to get away from them all," she confided to Margaret, when they were seated comfortably in Marion's room. "Have you known Mr. Hayward long?"

"I knew him first a year ago, and saw him frequently last winter."

"Isn't it strange? I feel as though I had known him a long time. Those things are so queer. Some people you have to make a business of getting acquainted with, and it is like a course in mathematics,—you never feel quite sure the problems are all solved; and with others it is so different. I felt like a sister to you after I had seen you three times."

"I am glad of that, for the feeling was mutual."

"Are you willing for me to call you Margaret?"

"I shall be very glad to have you, and I am sure it is proper. I call you Marion."

"Yes, but they all do that, because I am such an irresponsible creature, I suppose; but no one calls you Margaret. A sister has been a long-felt want with me, and you seem to fill the bill, if I call you by your name. I hope the dear gentlemen will forget about coming

here to call. I don't like for you to have that kind of visitor."

"For me! Where are you to be?"

"Oh, I will act as chaperon, but that doesn't count. We mustn't forget the church 'shindy' that Dr. Ainslee wants us to go to. We are getting to be horribly dissipated, aren't we?"

Chapter XXIV

MARGARET'S MEETING WITH GUTHRIE

The next Wednesday evening, there seemed an unusual air of excitement in the house at Gramercy Park.

"You are all very kind to lend your aid in this matter," said Dr. Ainslee, eating her soup a trifle hastily.

"I think we are to be more commended for lending our various presences," said Marion. "Think of every person in this house excepting Mrs. Congrene and Miss Crabtree going to that church to get her pity so stirred up over those poor little children that there will be no comfortable consciences for a week."

"I am grateful for the aid and the presence also, and I fancy a great many people who go will ease his or her conscience by adding another dollar or two to the ones they have already given."

"Listen to that," cried Marion. "She is getting us there under false pretenses, telling us she wants us to go, so as to feel sure that what we gave was for a good cause."

Every one laughed. "You can go forewarned, Marion," said Mrs. Congrene. "Knowing the plot, you can harden your heart."

At this moment, Sarah, the waitress, came in and gave Margaret a letter, saying, "The bye is after waiting for a answer, Miss."

Margaret read the note hastily, and said: "I am afraid that Marion and I can't go, after all. The gentleman who called the other day asked if he might bring a friend with him some evening, and this note asks if they may come to-night."

"He has given you a long time to consider it, hasn't he?" questioned Marion.

"He has explained. He learned this afternoon that he will be obliged to leave town to-morrow for ten days, and would like to come before he goes."

"Are they waiting at the door to be let in?" asked Marion.

"You wicked child," rebuked Mrs. Congrene, affectionately. "Get the writing things from the little reception-room. The boy is waiting for an answer."

After the answer had been dispatched, Mrs. Congrene noticed that Marion did not seem especially exhilarated over the prospect, and remarked:

"You see, Marion, you and Miss Armstrong have been delivered from Dr. Ainslee's mercenary designs."

"I think I would rather be fleeced by Dr. Ainslee."

"I always like to hear you say that word 'fleeced,' " said Miss Merrill.

"I like it myself. It is a good clean country expression," replied Marion.

"I suppose Ichabod used it sometimes,—that of course increased its beauty."

"Yes, he used it; every one in Paxton did, when they wanted to say just what it meant. I didn't fleece Ichabod, though, but perhaps it would have all been more simple if I had."

Mrs. Congrene suggested that Miss Armstrong and Marion should receive their callers in the living-room, while she and Miss Crabtree would occupy the little reception-room.

Margaret accepted the proffered kindness, on condition that Mrs. Congrene and Miss Crabtree should also remain in the living-room. She was very glad to have the company increased by them, as she felt the larger number would lessen her embarrassment.

"Why, yes, Mother Congrene, you must chaperon the affair. I can't imagine what we shall talk about, after the weather is done up. You and Miss Crabtree can brace up the conversation when it begins to wilt," said Marion.

"I can imagine the conversation wilting while you are helping to handle it," said Miss Crabtree, laughing. "I shall be happy to stay, for one.

I like to hear men talk, their minds seem so much more sound than women's."

"Then you will have to ask questions to start them up on the sound and substantial line," remarked Marion. "I don't believe men think that women care for the great questions and battles of life. They have an idea we like light skirmishes better."

"That is the trouble. We indulge them in this conceit of theirs, that we have inferior tastes and enjoyments," said Miss Crabtree.

"Well, let's brace up to-night, and show them what huge minds we have. Make them talk politics," whispered Marion, as the bell rang.

Miss Crabtree nodded a smiling assent.

Margaret was standing when the bell sounded. She involuntarily placed her hand over her heart to quiet its wild beating. She looked very beautiful in her simple white dress, but felt scarcely equal to the ordeal that was before her. When the cards were brought in, she went with Marion to the reception-room to welcome Mr. Hayward and to be presented to Mr. Guthrie. It was all so simple and undramatic, that she returned with the others to the living-room, feeling that from the confusion and complexity of existence her life had in a way righted itself and returned to its normal condition.

Guthrie had acknowledged the introduction in a most formal manner, but had apologized for the deceit by a glance. Margaret rejoiced in his strong, vigorous appearance, and experienced a subtle happiness in Mrs. Congrene's apparent approval of him. That lady managed to seem intimately near to both visitors. Her charming personality possessed the prerogative of sixty, and no one seemed outside its diffusive warmth.

"I think," she said after a short period of conversation, "my presence here needs a little explanation. Miss Armstrong suggested that Miss Crabtree and I should remain, and Miss Barton insisted, and when Miss Barton insists"— She stopped to give emphasis to her words.

"I am perfectly willing to have it all heaped on my shoulders," said Marion. "I will tell you what argument I used to induce them to stay," she continued frankly, turning to Mr. Hayward. "I thought it would be so embarrassing if conversation languished, and I asked them to stay to help brace it up."

Winter laughed. "Do you often need supporters in this capacity, Miss Barton?"

"That depends on the weight of the subject."

"Don't introduce anything too heavy. Guthrie and I haven't been developing our brain power with dumb-bells."

"Don't get frightened. We won't go into anything deep, if you feel unequal to it. We are interested in politics, and thought it would be a good opportunity to discuss matters."

"Marion," said Mrs. Congrene, somewhat reprovingly, "these gentlemen will think you are a politician. I am going to explain that this subject was mentioned under stress. Miss Crabtree remarked that she enjoyed hearing men talk, as their ideas are profound, and Marion immediately proposed that you should be encouraged to talk politics, it being, in her estimation, a profound subject."

"Where do we begin, Miss Barton?" asked Guthrie.

"Isn't there something about tariff that is important? Miss Crabtree, didn't you promise to light the fuse on some large questions?"

"Please don't aim them my way, Miss Crabtree," said Winter. "Guthrie will make a fine target for some such bombardment."

"I am in a bad predicament. I am expected to use ammunition I do not possess," returned Miss Crabtree.

"Perhaps we can reverse the situation. *We* will ask the questions, and get the profound thoughts from Miss Crabtree," suggested Guthrie.

"That is the idea!" exclaimed Winter. "What do you think of the government, Miss Crabtree?"

"I am not going to cry for quarter in this early stage of the siege. I think it might be improved."

"Just tell us how to mend matters, and we will have it attended to at once," said Winter.

"For one thing, I should like to have small life annuities issued. It would be such a blessing to simple-minded women. We do not know whom to trust. Banks do not always seem safe, and other investments are worse. But if the government could arrange it, it would seem so comfortable."

"As though Pa would never go back on you?" queried Winter.

"Yes, that is what I mean. We should feel perfectly safe."

"I think it is a fine idea," Guthrie remarked.

"Wouldn't there be danger of creating a feeling of dependence in us all? Wouldn't the self-reliance we need suffer from such conditions?" asked Margaret.

"I don't want self-reliance in money matters," said Marion. "There are so many other ways we can practice it, without making it such a grind. Don't you think so, Mother Congrene?"

"There are two sides to the question," replied Mrs. Congrene. "When we are well and strong, it may be better, as Miss Armstrong says, to depend on our own judgment, but on the other

side, when we are getting along in years, and are not strong, we should love the dear old country better for its care of us, and there are many in youth who lack good judgment in financial matters."

"Yes," said Margaret, "I am sure you are right. My only thought was that it is so much easier to depend on others, I was afraid it might be injurious."

Guthrie glanced toward her, cheered that she did not regard self-dependence as a luxury.

The others continued talking on the subject, rather leaving Guthrie and Margaret, who were sitting very near each other, out of the discussion.

"You are well, I hope," he remarked in a low tone.

"Yes, very well," she returned, then summoning all of her courage, she asked, "Were you able to obtain the—the document I advised you to get—I mean, without trouble?"

"I had no trouble whatever," replied Guthrie, shocked at his own ready deception.

Margaret brightened. She felt free, unrestrained, like an old self she had not met for months.

Some question was referred to Guthrie's opinion, and conversation again became general. Marion was at her best, and Winter Hayward

seemed in a state of repressed convulsions over her quaint remarks. The age of the evening was forgotten until Mrs. Cheswick and Miss Merrill passed through the hall on the way to their rooms.

"Hayward," said Guthrie, rising, "we shall have to apologize for staying so late."

"That is all wrong," returned Winter. "The ladies must do the apologizing for entertaining us so well as to make us forget time."

"Hayward would pass compliments if he were on the gallows," said Guthrie, dryly.

"He would probably do just what he has done to-night,—lay the cause for the gallows part on his poor feeble-minded friends," said Marion.

CHAPTER XXV

ANXIETY ABOUT MARION

"What are we going to do with Marion?" asked Dr. Ainslee one morning at breakfast.

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Congrene. "We have humored the dear child so much, and she has always been so bright and happy, I don't understand these days of depression. They are not like her."

"She isn't depressed," said Miss Merrill. "She is only just odd. Why did she insist last evening that she had to finish that picture? It wasn't true, or, I mean she might have left it, but she had just made up her mind not to see the callers, so she pretended she was obliged to work."

"Does she like these friends of Miss Armstrong, do you think?"

"I see no reason why she shouldn't," replied Mrs. Congrene. "They are both very agreeable gentlemen. Don't you call them so, Miss Crabtree?"

"Yes, indeed, they are more than that."

"You and Miss Crabtree seem to be favored individuals," remarked Miss Merrill.

"You know how it was that first evening. We

were the only ones in the house, and since then, they have very politely sent in cards to us as well as to Miss Armstrong and Marion, so that we could not always decline to see them; and last night I am sure it was very fortunate for Miss Armstrong we were able to help, as Marion was either odd or her picture interfered."

"I think Miss Armstrong has more patience with her than most people would have. Just think; after doing as she did last evening, when she must have known it made Miss Armstrong uncomfortable, she has dragged her off down to the Battery without her breakfast, to catch a morning glow."

"We must all have patience, Miss Merrill," said Mrs. Congrene. "Remember, she is only a child."

"But when you think of all she has done for herself, she doesn't seem such a child."

"Don't you see that everything she does is on the same line—her strong determination. I am not sure now but that she is working out some kind of salvation for herself that none of us understand," said Dr. Ainslee.

"Is it true," asked Miss Crabtree, "that she has turned her mirror to the wall, and never looks in one?"

"Yes, it is true," laughed Dr. Ainslee, "and no one would doubt it, the way she gets herself

up. I was in her room one night when she was getting ready for dinner, and if you could have seen her twist that pug, and draw every hair back so tightly, it would have been painful. I asked her if she liked it that way, and she said she never saw it, as she skipped mirrors every time she saw herself getting near one."

"Strange she feels that way," said Miss Crabtree. "I call her extremely attractive, even if her hair is in a vise."

"Do you know, I think she has grown very pretty this last summer," said Mrs. Congrene. "Here they are now," she added as the hall door closed.

"Hello, Mother Congrene," sighed Marion, coming in and sitting down at her right hand. "I am as hungry as a shark," she remarked.

"I should think you might be," said Dr. Ainslee, "going off at such an unearthly hour. It seems to me, Marion, you are burning your candle at both ends, working so late at night, then going out again before sunrise."

"Am I?" she asked in a tone that touched their hearts. "I'll tell you what I will do," she announced, brightening. "I will burn the candle at both ends as fast as possible. Then when it is finished, I will have a torch—no, a grand electric light that glows like the sun. I must have brightness some way."

"Are you going to paint something that casts a glow of fame about you?" asked Dr. Ainslee, gently.

"You guess my conundrums too easily. I must do something."

"I will tell you one thing you must do. Don't let ambition interfere with your duties in life. You must remember, you owe your friends something, and not allow even your inclinations to make you forget that."

"I understand what you mean, and I will try to behave properly, but I can't make an angel of myself in a minute." Marion kept her word, and came down whenever Guthrie and Hayward called. This occurred once a week always, and frequently oftener. She was so bright and gay, that no one excepting Margaret suspected she still had her hours of depression.

They called one evening in April and invited Mrs. Congrene, Miss Crabtree, Margaret and Marion to the opera the next evening. All seemed much pleased, as it was something they especially wished to hear, excepting Marion. She said very little until she was in Margaret's room.

"I can't go, Margaret," she exclaimed as soon as they were alone.

"Why can't you go, Marion?"

"Oh, you don't know what it means to be

ugly, when you would give your soul to be beautiful to some one."

"What has that to do with to-morrow night?"

"What has it to do? Can't you understand? There are always such pretty girls and women at those places, that it is awful to think of the comparison. Sitting up there like a great mauk, as though I look just as I want to."

"But Marion dear, can't you understand? You are not a mauk, whatever that may be, but just a dear girl."

"I don't care how dear I am. I'm like cheap pottery, all right in my place, perhaps, but when I am put up beside rare china I can't stand the contrast. I can't go. Don't ask me." Her head dropped into her hands, and her body shook with suppressed sobs.

"I am not going to argue the point with you in regard to your looks, but if you will do what I ask you, and to-morrow night you do not wish to go, no one will urge you, I am very sure."

"What is the stunt,—dye my hair or pad my cheeks?" she asked, smiling up through her tears.

"It is that you shall buy a dress of my choosing to-morrow morning. It shall not be very expensive."

"I am willing to do that, but the dress can't make me over."

"Perhaps not. We will wait and see."

Marion was quite submissive the next morning. Margaret arranged her hair, which seemed to feel no resentment at its long restraint, but, aided by a misty morning, curled and waved tenderly about her young face.

They went early to attend to the shopping. Marion appeared to take no interest in the matter, and when Margaret chose a soft gray-green crêpe affair, she looked skeptical, but said nothing.

"It is fine, was the decision of the young woman who was waiting on them. "Does not the young lady wish to look in the mirror? No? Then let me speak to Monsieur Lefaure. He is an artist in his taste."

Monsieur raised his hands in ecstasy.

"It is ravishing," he said. "Ze color—it is perfeck. It makes one picture beautiful."

Margaret agreed that it was all right, and directed it to be sent home.

"That man was a Frenchman," said Marion, when they were on the street. "But he must have kissed the Blarney stone. Any one would think that I was Helen of Troy, the way he went on."

"Wait until you see yourself to-night."

"I don't think I shall say, 'It is one picture beautiful.' "

She repeated the incident at dinner that night, describing the man's adoring looks and gestures in her ridiculous way.

"Why can't we all come up and see you, Marion, before you decide if you will or will not go?"

"All cordially invited to attend," returned Marion. "Performance begins at seven-thirty. If you should see the heroine weep, and tear her hair, you need not be surprised."

So at seven-thirty all excepting Mrs. Congrene and Miss Crabtree were standing outside Marion's door.

Margaret opened it softly, triumph in her eyes.

"Marion!" they all exclaimed.

"Has she looked in the mirror yet?" Dr. Ainslee asked.

Margaret shook her head negatively.

"Oh, she must wear my little filigree silver necklace!" exclaimed Miss Bacon. "It will look lovely on that delicate gray-green!" And she rushed away.

"I have a bracelet that matches Miss Bacon's necklace perfectly," said Miss Merrill, running after her.

They were both back in a moment, clasping necklace and bracelet.

"She must wear my white broadcloth opera

coat," said Miss Willard. "It is the one nice thing I have."

"I feel like a Christmas tree. Any one got anything more to hang on me?" inquired Marion.

"I will furnish confection," said Dr. Ainslee, kissing her.

Margaret wheeled the cheval glass, brought from her room, so that the light would strike it right, and Dr. Ainslee turned Marion tenderly toward it.

"Margaret!" she exclaimed, glancing at herself, then looking toward the others, with doubt, wonder and astonishment.

"Is it I," she whispered, "or is it some elusive joke?"

"Its yirsilf sure," said Miss Bacon, in imitation of Sarah.

"Why," she laughed, a low puzzled laugh, "I am almost beautiful."

"You are not *almost*, you are *quite*," said Dr. Ainslee.

"And I have contour. The last time I met this creature her face was prominent for skin and bones."

"I give my doses credit for some of that," said Dr. Ainslee.

"Who made her plump?" recited Marion, in her excitement relapsing to nursery rhymes. "Dr. Ainslee, with her doses and oils, she made

her plump. It is like a fairy tale," she continued, happy tears springing to her eyes. "None of you can know how heavenly it is, not to feel like hiding."

"Time is up," called Mrs. Congrene. "Come down and let Miss Crabtree and me behold the sight."

So they all went to the living-room, where more admiration was expressed. Margaret wore a soft gray gown, unnoticeable only as a compliment to her dark hair, gray eyes, and the flush in her cheeks.

When Guthrie and Winter came, Marion was glowing. She had been such a revelation to herself, she felt that she must startle all beholders.

"Do you see how fine I look?" she asked impulsively, turning to Winter.

The usual light and ready answer did not seem forthcoming, but his look of appreciation suited Marion better than any words.

"Margaret did it. She took me in hand, and I feel as though I ought to be introduced to the new me."

"Rather embarrassing to be a stranger to yourself, isn't it?" asked Guthrie.

"Oh, no; it is delightful. I feel like a prima donna walking in air."

"Miss Armstrong, it will be safer for you to hold on to Marion; she may be walking up

to the clouds, if she feels that way," remarked Miss Merrill.

"No danger of that. I want to stay in sight. I have always thought the greatest fun in being an angel would be in being seen and admired, but I will allow you to remind me once in a while that I am still mortal, with red hair," she said, turning to Winter.

The little act of choosing her escort, when the matter had seemed an unknown quantity, amused and charmed the bystanders. But Winter appeared to accept the trust with happiness. "Never fear," he said. "We will unite to keep you properly subdued."

"I hope," said Mrs. Cheswick, as the carriages rolled away, "that this is not going to spoil the child." She was feeling a trifle sad, that Sammy was not in Winter's place.

"Spoil her!" echoed Dr. Ainslee. "It is going to perfect her. The knowledge that she is beautiful seems her rightful inheritance."

Chapter XXVI

UNCLE BEN AGAIN

The morning following the opera party being Sunday, the household at Mrs. Congrene's was not astir at its usual hour. Margaret was idly speculating on the future, when there was a tap on the door. In answer to her summons to enter, Marion walked in, a letter in her right hand. She was in a white crêpe kimono, over which rippled a mass of sunburnt hair. Her usually bright color was gone, and the pallor accentuated by the black brows and lashes, was so striking, that Margaret exclaimed, "Why, Marion, are you ill?"

Marion laughed. "Ill! What makes you think that? I never felt better."

"You are shockingly pale, and I expected to see you so bright and happy this morning, that you would be almost more exquisite than last night, and at midnight you were a dream."

"Dissipation, my child," returned Marion, seating herself. "I came in to talk to you, but not about my appearance. I know I look a fright,—just pays me for being so puffed up with vanity last night."

"But you don't look a fright. You are like a grieved statue of beauty."

"Margaret, you are flowery. What did Mr. Guthrie say to put you in such a poetic mood? Before you answer that question, will you tell me what you understood Mr. Hayward to say about his sister?"

"He said that she is coming to New York to buy her trousseau, and her father is coming with her."

"But when? When does the great event occur? When do we hear the drums, and see the street parade? They are great swells, aren't they?"

"I will answer the first question, and leave the other to the future. As I understood, they are not quite sure. You know we were invited to hear 'Martha' next Saturday night, but Mr. Hayward said if his father and sister came, he should not be able to go, and Mr. Guthrie would take us, but if they did not reach here before Sunday or Monday, he could go all right."

"I see; Pa and Sis come first."

"I like that," said Margaret, gently.

"So do I," agreed Marion. "Nothing like standing by your family. Shows you have patience and endurance."

"What is the matter with you, Marion? I thought you were a very happy girl last night."

"So I was. So I am. Who says I am not?"

"You don't seem quite as gay as I enjoy seeing you. Have you a letter?" she asked, espying the crumpled sheet in Marion's hand.

"Yes, it came in the last mail yesterday, but I was so excited getting plumed, I forgot it, and did not think of it until six o'clock this morning."

"Does the delay in reading make any difference in any way?"

"No. It is from Uncle Ben. He is coming to New York again for two weeks."

"When will he arrive?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

"Does Aunt Sarah come with him?"

"No, I think not," Marion returned, referring to the letter. "It is just Uncle Ben all by himself. He says he didn't see enough of me those few days."

"You have reason to be happy," said Margaret, trying to put the best side on the matter.

"Of course I have. Happiness seems to be like a bargain counter. Everything there that you don't want, all marked so cheap, you feel as though you ought to take the lot. The real article comes higher, but I have heard does not wear a bit better."

"You are not troubling about Uncle Ben's outward appearance, are you, Marion?" asked

Margaret, subtly feeling the cause of the girl's discomfort. "You know the plainest things are most often sterling."

Marion went off in a fit of laughter. "I can't help thinking of Uncle Ben all the way through as he is on the outside," she gasped. "But bless your heart, if he had been properly polished, he would have been a most expensive piece of humanity, for he is pure gold, excepting a skim so thin you can see right through it, if you know him well. If one doesn't, he is just a funny old codger, but I don't mean that any one shall have a chance to make fun of him."

"No one could think of doing such an unkind thing. I can't bear to see you feeling so subdued. You were so happy last evening."

"Margaret, do you remember 'The Ugly Duckling'? I almost felt last night that I was a swan, and I have often wondered if the poor swan didn't remember its young-duck days when it was sailing about later with swans who had had early swan advantages. But don't you trouble about me. I am happy, and I am going to make Uncle Ben happy, even if it takes the last bit of pride I have left. That white opera coat of Miss Willard's was so comforting to my vanity, I am going to buy one to-morrow just for Uncle Ben's benefit. He will enjoy seeing me look nice."

"I would," advised Margaret. "Will Uncle Ben care for the opera?"

"No, music doesn't appeal to him; but he will feel cheated if he does not see a nice play or two."

"Will you be able to hear 'Martha' Saturday evening?"

"No." Marion winced at the recollection of the conflict she had had, to reach such a decision. "I am going to stick to dear Uncle Ben every evening he is in town. I told Dick when he was here before that he might come down again for a longer stop, and he told me of a nice place where we can both board."

"Are you going away from here for the two weeks?"

"Yes, and I am not going to tell a soul where I am going."

"Marion, you can't mean that. Why should you do such a strange thing?"

"I don't know," Marion replied, dropping her head on a sofa pillow. "I think it would be better all around if I never came back, and perhaps I won't."

CHAPTER XXVII

AFTER THE OPERA

The after-opera-and-theatre rendezvous for the semi-fashionable was crowded that Saturday night. Mr. Hayward with his daughter and George Gould had reached New York at a late hour, and they were now enjoying the prospect of an abundant repast, as there had been only time after dressing for a hasty cup of tea before the hour for the curtain to rise. They had telephoned to Winter and found he was not at home. The decision to come that afternoon instead of the next day had been made at the last moment, in order to give Mary an opportunity for the final night of an actress she very much wished to see. Their good luck in securing tickets at the eleventh hour had put Mary Hayward in rather a happy frame of mind, but her brows contracted when George Gould attempted to use his napkin as a bib.

He would have felt her disapproval with his eyes closed, and the moment he became conscious of the cause, the napkin was returned to his lap with a blush of shame in his nervous removal of it.

A scrap of pity for his humility passed over

Mary. In earlier years it would have been scorn. She now touched his arm gently. "George," she whispered, "did you ever see such an exquisite creature?" His eyes rested for a moment on the young girl she had indicated, seated at the next table. He saw an opportunity for a compliment, and turning looked into Mary's face.

"Yes, I have seen a more exquisite one," he replied.

"Nonsense," she scoffed softly. "She is simply perfect. Father, stop studying the menu and look at that girl."

Mr. Hayward adjusted his eye-glasses, and did as he had been directed.

"Isn't she a beauty, father?" Mary asked after a moment.

"She is indeed, and I should judge is the original copy."

"I don't understand," murmured George.

"Why, she is as the Lord made her, untouched by modern art. In other words, she is natural, not artificial. But by Jupiter, behold her escort! Are they Pluto and Proserpine?"

The iced oysters demanded their attention just then, but Mary and her father continued to glance curiously from time to time at the strange couple, who appeared to be enjoying themselves immensely.

"And you say Ichabod Parsley didn't die of a broken heart, Uncle Ben?" the girl remarked.

"Wal, no, he ain't exactly dead, leastways he ain't berrid yit; but he's a norful do-nothin'. Peers though he'd never knowed just what to tackle fust sense his mother died, an' I dunno's that's strange. She was a norful highstrung woman—never let him do nothin' 'thout she told him to. She was all Bradley. Her mother was half-sister to old Job Bradley. He was a norful ni old dog. They said he pulled the nails outer Steve Blake's corn-crib for his fust wife's coffin,—but then, ye can hear most anything if ye hark long 'nough."

"Doesn't Susan inspire any ambition in Ike?"

"Inspire! Lord, no. She ain't gut the gumption of a mouse. If he'd merrid somebody with some grit in um, guess he'd stepped livelier. He'd orter hed you on his track."

"Honest, Uncle Ben, do you wish I had stayed in Paxton and looked after Ike's welfare?"

"Ter tell ye the gospel truth, Mary Ann, I don't. I have hankered for a sight of ye turbly sometimes, and I thought ye was foolish and hard-bitted ter go off as ye did, but as I said to yer Aunt Sarah, sez I: 'The girl is all Hitchcock and gumption. She can't help it.' "

"It was horrid of me, Uncle Ben, and nothing but the fact that you have forgiven me in the

first degree has kept me from feeling awfully sorry for it."

"Don't, don't, Mary Ann. Jest think of the four hunderd dollars ye might of hed to help out, and not hed sech a hard time. An' to think thet I was sech an ole numskull as to think I knowed what was inside yer head better'n ye did yerself. I told yer, didn't I," he asked, lowering his voice, "that I brung it down, an' I'm going to fork it over 'fore I go." He tapped his chest to indicate the locality of the money.

"Don't talk about going home. Aren't you having a good time?" asked Marion.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "fust rate. But I ain't cut out for this sort er thing fur long ter time." He glanced about the crowded room.

"What kind of er fuss they havin' ter that table?"

Marion noticed that some kind of commotion was going on. The gentlemen were searching their pockets.

"I know perfectly well," said the older man, "when it must have happened. Do you remember those two men who came along just as we were coming out of the theatre? They said they were hurrying to catch a train. They did not succeed in getting along very fast until they passed us, then they seemed to have no trouble in making speed."

"Yes, I remember," said George, "and I thought at the time that they were acting queerly."

"What are you going to do?" asked Mary. "Have you your check-book?"

"No; have you, George?"

"No, I never use one away from Riseton."

"Do you suppose we can get Winter?"

"No; if he wasn't at home half an hour ago, he wouldn't be now. He may be away for the night."

"Isn't there any one in town you can call up, father?"

"Not at this time of the night. My signature might be good at one of the banks, but the banks are not open an hour before midnight."

"What a pity you were taking care of my money! I had enough to settle the dinner bill."

Mr. Hayward called the waiter. "We find that our pockets have been picked and we haven't any money. Will you explain the situation to the manager? I want to know what we can do to satisfy the demands of this place."

The waiter hurried away, and in a few moments the man to whom he had appealed for directions sauntered up to them. A skeptical smile played about his mouth as he glanced down on Mr. Hayward while he was making the explanation.

"We want to know what we can do about the matter," Mr. Hayward concluded. "I have friends in the city whom I can reach to-morrow, but it is impossible to-night."

"Yes, I have heard that kind of a story before," replied the man, sneeringly.

"What do you mean to insinuate?" demanded Mr. Hayward, angrily.

"I don't insinuate. I simply say that I have met your kind before. It is time you were made an example of."

"Father," interrupted Mary, "I have this." She touched the diamond ring on her finger, and glanced at George, who nodded approval.

"My daughter will place her ring as security until to-morrow."

The man smiled. "This isn't a pawn shop," he said. "I can't tell what quality of glass that may be. The best thing to do is to remind you that you can't try this dodge again. John," he called to the waiter, "send for the police."

Mr. Hayward rose in consternation, looking helplessly toward his daughter. "You can't mean such an indignity as you intimate," he said.

"You will see in less than ten minutes," returned the man.

"Say, son," came a voice from the next table. At the same moment a chair was pushed noisily back, and Uncle Ben rose to his great height.

"I gut an idee that I've 'bout scrip 'nough in my wallet to settle up this scrape, so you may jes let ther perlice 'lone."

"Why do you interfere? These people deserve punishment, and you have no right to prevent it," said the man.

"Maby they're friends er mine. Peers ter me yer countenance looks sorter familiar ter me, but I can't seem ter place ye."

"Thank you for your help. My name is Hayward."

"Hayward—Hayward. Ye ain't the man 't gut upset out of er boat at Percy Lake, up Adirondack way, some twenty-five or -eight year ago, air ye?"

"I am that man. And you. Are you the man who saved my life?"

"Wal, I dunno. I hauled ye out, but you's pretty ni done fur."

"Yes, yes, I know. And your son."

"No, 'twa'n't my son. 'Twas my nephew,—that girl's father."

"Well, he put life in the body you had saved. As soon as I recovered I tried to find you, but never succeeded."

"Say," said Uncle Ben, in a low tone. "Can't we set down? I ain't much on makin' a show er myself."

"Certainly," acquiesced Mr. Hayward. "Do

you know, I have never forgotten you, but I have, your name."

"Barton's my name."

He was introduced to Mary, and George Gould. Then Marion was brought over and presented. The two tables were consolidated, Uncle Ben sitting next to Mr. Hayward.

"Now, tell me, please, how you disappeared so quickly."

Uncle Ben laughed. "We wa'n't hidin'," he said. "The way 'twas, my nephew was looking after a place to settle in. I brung him up, so when he was ready to go to doctorin', he ast me to go 'long with him, ter advise. Ye see, I'd sent 'im ter school, and he felt he could sorter rely on my jedgment. We'd jest struck Percy Lake when ye fell in, and he wouldn't budge an inch till he knowed you's goin' ter pull out all right. We'd promised ter be back home in two weeks, so we sorter hurried 'long, as we'd stayed half on it there."

"It has always been a great trial to me that I have never been able to thank the man who saved my life. When we are alone I want to talk to you about it. Your nephew must have become a good doctor, for I learned afterwards how wisely he cared for me."

"No." There was a touch of sadness in the old man's voice. "He died, when his little girl

was 'bout four days old. He settled in Albany, but it didn't agree with 'im. He cum home, and died er gallopin' consumption. An' his wife went in 'bout a month, kinder brokenhearted. We brung up his little girl same's we did 'im. I was awful set on havin' her stay in the country, where 'tis healthy, but she was highty-tighty for studyin' art. She got 'er way, and now, by King, she's earnin' more'n one month than I kin scrape offun the farm in six."

"We old fellows want the young folks to do our way, but some way or other they seem to get things the way they want them. I have a son who— Why, there he is now. Hello, Winter. I am glad to see you."

Such a confusion of explanations were hard to understand, but Mr. Hayward's voice silenced all for a moment. "You will remember, Winter, that I have always regretted being unable to find the man who saved my life. This is he, Mr. Barton, and this is his niece, Miss Barton."

"Great-niece," corrected Uncle Ben.

"I have a fancy that I have met Miss Barton before," replied Winter, happily, holding her hand firmly.

"How do you happen to be here at this hour?" asked Mr. Hayward, after the proper introduction had been made, and the remainder of the opera party had been seated at the next table.

"We have been to the opera. It lasted late."

Chapter XXVIII

THE HIGHER EDUCATION

If Marion despaired of being an angel, she had not sounded the depths of her nature under the right conditions, for she seemed to the household in Gramercy Park to outdo in sunshine and general dearness the most angelic qualities that could be imagined.

"She hasn't changed in the least," said Dr. Ainslee, one evening, when they were discussing her during her absence. "She has only added a perfect content and happiness to all the adorable charms she possessed before."

"I hope it is all going to end right," sighed Mrs. Cheswick, a little sadly.

"Why, there is to be no end," protested Dr. Ainslee. "Marion is not one of the kind to be extinguished until she is dead. We have had an example of her fortitude already."

"But she hasn't been through with *all* of the trials of life yet. She is very fond of people, when she cares for them at all. I sometimes think how dreadful it would be if she should place her affection where it wasn't returned. I think it would break her heart."

"Nonsense," retorted Dr. Ainslee. "Marion is going to be happy to the end of the chapter."

"I hope the young man is in earnest," persisted Mrs. Cheswick, still in a tone of commiseration.

"Why, Mrs. Cheswick!" exclaimed Miss Merrill. "Marion isn't dependent on any man for happiness."

Dr. Ainslee closed her lips and said nothing.

"I am sure," ventured Miss Willard, "no one could seem more thoughtful and delicate than these gentlemen. Poor Mrs. Congrene! I hope she will not get rheumatism, waiting around the park these nights."

Miss Page laughed "Miss Crabtree says she feels like a special police force, but I think she enjoys it. She says that it is really delightful there moonlight evenings. She and Mrs. Congrene talk and rest, and enjoy the flashes of wit when the others come around their way."

"For my part," spoke up Dr. Ainslee, "I enjoy it. It seems more beautiful to me to see a little healthful romance going on about one, than to be obliged to go to the theatre to be fooled by it. It is an element of life we almost forget exists, living as one-sidedly as we do, and when we have the chance to behold it I think it is best not to mistake it for a funeral."

"Doesn't really seem like one," said Miss Bacon, as the sound of footsteps and the murmur of happy voices came from outside the door.

"Aren't you all coming in?" called Miss Merrill, as the door opened, and the evening party minus the gentlemen entered.

Marion stepped in for a moment, kissed her hand to them all, and was upstairs in a flash.

When Margaret reached her room ten minutes later, she found her there.

"Margaret," she asked as she came toward the door to meet her, "will you tell me what your heart is made of? Cast iron? Stone? Or haven't you any?"

"Why do you ask such a question, Marion?"

"Mr. Hayward told me to-night that he once asked you to marry him. How could you do as you did, unless your heart is ossified?"

"It was a mistake," faltered Margaret.

"Oh, no, it wasn't a mistake; it was lovely. He says he cared, but it was like a preparatory course for the finishing degree; and Margaret, I am—I am the higher education."

"You dear child, I am so happy for you! He is a fine man."

"Fine!" exclaimed Marion, "I don't believe God ever made two such men. And do you know why he has liked copper hair so much? He saw me at the art school over in Boston two

years ago, then forgot it. But he says his soul reminded him of it a few months back, and he thinks his soul has always remembered. Isn't it like a story all the way through?"

"Yes, it is charming."

"I wish," said Marion softly, putting her arm about Margaret's waist, "that Mr. Guthrie hadn't a wife. You are so suited for each other. Mr. Hayward thinks she has deserted him. I wish some one would get up the courage to ask about it. When do you expect to see him again?"

"I have promised to go to walk to-morrow evening."

"Alone? Unchaperoned?"

"Yes."

"Then I think you are going to hear the worst."

Chapter XXIX

THE LATE CONFESSIONS

"You can't imagine whom I saw this afternoon," said Guthrie, as he and Margaret were walking quite unconventionally about the park, after a short promenade on the avenue.

"I ought to be able to," returned Margaret, "if it was some one we both know. Our mutual friends are not numerous, you must remember."

"I think you may find it difficult to pitch on the right one."

"Was the person a Colorado acquaintance?"

"That seems to be telling half of the story, but I will give you that advantage. Yes."

"Miss Curtis?"

"No, but you are getting so near the truth, I may as well tell you. I met Miss Belcher in O— this afternoon, and if you will believe me, she has made good her right to the Bradford book. She has married a druggist over there by that name, and is living at peace with herself and all the world."

"What pleasant news. Did you inquire for Miss Curtis?"

"Yes, she is abroad, quite restored to health."

"Is O— a pleasant place?"

"Yes, it is fine. Hayward asked me to go up with him this afternoon to look at two houses he has bought. They are delightful, and well located. The large gardens adjoin, and the broad piazzas are within speaking distance."

"Mr. Hayward has bought them, did you say?"

"Yes. But one is for sale, if he can find the right party to buy it."

"Isn't it quite a distance from the city?"

"Oh, no, it takes less than an hour to come down; and it is so far ahead of the city to live in! Has Miss Barton confided anything to you, Margaret?"

"Yes. Isn't it a most happy affair?"

"I think it is. Hayward seems in the seventh heaven, and I am sure Miss Barton ought to be. She is getting a prize. Let us sit down here. I want to ask you a question. Are you willing that I should tell Hayward about our earlier acquaintance—all of it, I mean?"

"If you wish," Margaret replied slowly.

"Are you also willing to tell Miss Barton? If I tell Hayward, she will know it sooner or later."

"You think there will be but a single mind?"

"I think that is the way things should be," he returned, looking at Margaret, intently.

"Oh, the moon is coming up," said Margaret,

rising hastily. "Can't we get the first glance it gives us?"

They wandered about, trying to find the best vantage-point to watch the gleam of gold, which the increasing light heralded, rise above the surrounding housetops.

As they stood waiting, Guthrie spoke suddenly.

"Margaret, do you know why I seemed unwilling for you to marry me, when you proposed it out of pity?"

"No," she replied wonderingly.

"It was because I loved you even then better than heaven, and felt it unjust to your pity."

"Mac," whispered Margaret, "do you know why I left Colorado?"

"Why?" he asked earnestly, intensely, his arm extending protectingly about her waist.

"It was because I loved you better than both heaven and earth."

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